

Introduction

The history of Muslim-Byzantine relations begins with the inception of Islam in the first/seventh century and continues to the fall of the Byzantine empire in A.D. 1453. From the early days of Islamic expansion, which came only decades after the revelation of the new faith, the Islamic community was in a state of enmity with Byzantium. After the collapse of the Persian empire in the first/seventh century, the Byzantine state remained the primary power that was capable of opposing the nascent Islamic community. Muslim expeditions against Byzantine territory were undertaken on a regular basis, and the early skirmishes between Islam and Byzantium, the unsuccessful Muslim attempts to capture Constantinople, and the establishment of defined frontiers between the two powers all served to fix Byzantium as Islam's principal enemy. Hence, although the early caliphate expanded to the east, west, and north, the Byzantine frontier became the constant focus of Arab attention. This conflict necessarily directed the orientation of the medieval Arabic-Islamic sources, and in many instances, military and political affairs dominated the major chronicles and historical works. For instance, the Muslim chronicler al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) lists at the end of each year's annals the raids on Byzantine territory that were carried out by the Muslims.

This preoccupation with warfare between the two empires ultimately led to a distorted overview of Muslim-Byzantine relations, for there was also a less adversarial side to the relations between Byzantium and the Muslims. Treaties were frequently signed, the frontiers were more or less stable for long periods, and campaigning across the frontier eventually attained a ritual quality. Paradoxically, the permanent state of war did not discourage peaceful contacts, which arose in a variety of contexts—through continuous commercial relations, the exchange of embassies, the internment and ransom of prisoners of war, the deportation of conquered urban populations, the movements of traitors and exiles, the Byzantine women kept as harem slaves, the conclusion of truces, the relations between the eastern patriarchates and the patriarch of Constantinople, and pilgrimages to the Holy Land. In addition, a few Byzantine emperors, such as Leo VI (r. A.D. 886–912) and Alexander (r. A.D. 912–913), had Muslim advisers, just as Muslim caliphs used Christian and sometimes Byzantine civil servants and counselors.¹

The frontier was a barrier but also a point of contact. If according to Islamic legal theory a state of war exists between *dār al-islām* (territory of Islam) and *dār al-ḥarb* (territory of war), brief spans of peace are possible whether by a peace treaty or by an *amān* (safe-conduct), which helps to explain the ease with which Muslims and non-Muslims crossed frontiers.² Thus, a citizen of Byzantium might obtain permission to take up residence in Muslim territory to engage in commerce. Similarly, by the fourth/tenth century, Muslim merchants were established in Trebizond, in some towns in Bithynia, and even in the Byzantine capital, Constantinople. Cultural and political frontiers seldom, if ever, coincided; indeed, residents at the peripheries of both empires developed a common frontier culture that included a shared tradition of epic poetry. Thus, a semiporous border permitted the exchange of ideas and standards, manners and customs, languages and literatures. The result of this interpenetration was the diffusion of culture, political ideas and insti-

tutions, military techniques, material goods, and methods of economic production.³ Byzantium was not, therefore, a strange and wonderful land. It was relatively well known, leaving limited room for fantastic speculation. Moreover, as heirs to the Abrahamic tradition, the Byzantines and the Muslims shared a common linear historical outlook that led from the first day of creation to the certainty of God's final judgment. This similarity in religious perspectives and ethical standards meant that each was able to understand the slogans and reasoning of the other. Indeed, the Muslims felt closer to the Byzantine empire, both religiously and culturally, than it did to any other power. In fact, Islamic civilization adopted substantial features from Byzantium, such as concepts of state and administration and elements of its material and intellectual culture. Consequently, any analysis of the various aspects of the Arab Muslim image of the Byzantine empire must acknowledge the effect that Byzantium had on the developing Islamic civilization and also the state of perpetual warfare between them.

Islam and Byzantium were in a changing and dialectically constituted historical relationship with one another. By adopting a literary critical approach, the present work is able to trace the Arabic-Islamic view of Byzantium as it evolved through centuries of warfare, contact, and exchanges in the context of regional historical developments. The literature on this subject is limited, although studies are increasingly being published on various aspects of East-West interactions and perceptions during medieval times. Works instigated by the recent debate on Orientalism and by the renewed Christian-Muslim dialogue have tackled the issue of perception and representation, but only a few scholars have handled the issue from the specific perspective of Arab-Byzantine relations. Instead, most such works have focused on the relations between the Muslim East and the Latin West. These studies are, moreover, rooted in an ideological project that seeks to understand the antecedents of the current problematic relationship between Islam and the West. For example, Muhammad Nūr al-Dīn Afāya concludes the introduction to his

recent Arabic work—entitled, in English, *The Imagined West*—by saying that he will “try to uncover the stereotypes embedded in the medieval Islamic discourse since some of its expressions continue to be relevant to the crux of the current ‘Arab’ question about the self and ‘other’, about Islam and the West.”⁴

Several studies on Byzantine perceptions of Arabic-Islamic people, culture, and history are currently available.⁵ Arab perceptions of Byzantium have similarly witnessed a cumulative increase in recent years. Marius Canard’s work constitutes a fundamental contribution to both Arab-Byzantine relations and mutual perceptions. André Miquel includes an important chapter on the Byzantine empire in his seminal work *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu’au milieu du XI^e siècle*, focusing on material written by Arab Muslim geographers of the third/ninth, fourth/tenth, and fifth/eleventh centuries. Ahmad Shboul’s *Al-Mas’ūdī and His World* also devotes a chapter to the treatment of the Byzantines that is found in the works of al-Mas’ūdī. An important addition to this scholarship is Mohamed Tahar Mansouri’s *Recherches sur les relations entre Byzance et l’Égypte (1259–1453) (d’après les sources arabes)*. Finally, various articles published in a large variety of journals and collected works have contributed to enhancing our understanding of the Arab’s image of Byzantium.⁶

Byzantium played an inestimable role in the collective imagination of Arabic-Islamic societies. Knowledge of the Byzantine empire was not marginalized and confined to isolated Muslim scholars: Byzantium was a topic of unlimited concern, and information about it was vital to the military and political decisions taken by the caliphate, to commercial interests, and even to the every day concerns of ordinary Muslims. Hence, Muslim reports on Byzantium are never completely dissociated from references, either explicit or implicit, to the Arabic-Islamic world, and in a number of profound and unspoken ways, the Muslims’ own self-definition was connected with the way in which they related to the Byzantines. This book yields relatively little new empirical knowledge about Byzantium, but its investigations

into the significance of Byzantium to the Arab Muslim establishment and Muslim appreciation of Byzantine culture and civilization contribute to efforts to find the foundational discourses that underlie Arab Muslim formulations of alterity. By examining the Arab Muslim view of the world, of morality, and of ideal behavior, this book contends that the Arabic-Islamic texts and the representations found within them have helped shape reality and that the emerging civilization's attempt to construct and produce a distinctive identity defined Islam's view of Byzantium to a considerable extent.

ARABIC-ISLAMIC SOURCES

The historical framework of this study stretches from the first/seventh century to the mid-ninth/fifteenth century—from the first reference to Byzantium in the Qur'ān up until the fall of Constantinople in A.D. 1453. Widely varying Arabic-Islamic sources, particularly religious and secular prose texts, were consulted in an attempt to formulate a Muslim image of Byzantium and answer the question of how Muslim society marked its internal and external boundaries and defined "otherness."

One major challenge to examining initial contacts between Byzantium and the early Muslim *umma* arises from the controversy surrounding the traditional Islamic account of Islamic origins. Indeed, the traditional Arabic-Islamic sources are not contemporaneous with the events they purport to relate and sometimes were written many centuries later. These sources contain internal complexities, anachronisms, discrepancies, and contradictions. Moreover, many of them provide evidence of embellishment and invention that were introduced to serve the purposes of political or religious apologetic.⁷ A number of critics have turned to contemporary evidence from outside the Muslim community to construct what they felt might be a more historically accurate vision of Islam's origins and early developments.⁸ The object in the present endeavor, however, is not to confirm or refute a core of data about historical Byzantium and early Islam

but to study the contribution of this Arabic-Islamic corpus to the discourse on Byzantium.

Texts interact with one another and with contexts in complex ways. In rejecting an opposition between text and reality, critics have noted that texts do not simply exist as a prelinguistic reality that language faithfully describes. Rather, reality is "always already" situated in or shaped by textual processes.⁹ The Islamic texts in question partook in this complexity and had to conform to the conventions of their respective genres. Since no writing took place in the abstract, the representations were dependent on traditions and orthodoxy. Writers came to assume that their audience possessed some previous knowledge of Byzantium to which they referred and on which they relied. Thus, a work that included material on Byzantium affiliated itself with other works containing similar material.

Some of these texts are compilations, such as the canonical collections of prophetic traditions. *Hadīth* literature is a unique body of material. Compiled in the two centuries following the death of the Prophet in 11/632, it records the actions, words, and tacit approvals attributed to the Prophet. The material of early *ḥadīth* was an undifferentiated mass of individual reports including legal injunctions, rituals, ethical conduct, eschatology, the virtues of individual tribes, biographical fragments, the Prophet's expeditions, correct manners, admonitions, and homilies. *Hadīth* rapidly asserted its authority as a repository of the community's early religious and historical experiences.¹⁰ The *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim (d. 261/874) brought together everything that was recognized as genuine in the orthodox circles in the third/ninth century. The material included in the books of tradition is comprehensive and deals with large domains of Muslim life. Collections of *ḥadīth* include apocalyptic traditions that involve the city of Constantinople in addition to other Byzantine material.

Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) is one of the most important branches of Qur'anic science. Qur'ān commentaries have, in recent years, been exploited to "reconstruct trends and motiva-

tions in exegesis as revealed by the use and invention of textual and orthographic variants to the Qur'ān." One of the functions of interpretation is to adapt the text to the present situation of the interpreter, making the text applicable to the faith and way of life of the believers and aligning it with established social custom, legal position, and doctrinal assertions.¹¹ Exegetical commentaries contain copious explanations on the opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm* that refer to the Byzantine-Persian wars of the early first/seventh century.

Works more historical in nature, such as the *Sīra* (biography of the Prophet) of Ibn Hishām (d. 213/828), which holds pride of place in the Islamic tradition, contain several references to the Byzantines in various contexts, including warfare, justice, trade, and diplomatic relations with Emperor Heraclius. The conquest literature, which chronicles the early conflict between Byzantium and the Arab-Muslim forces, digresses to include a substantial amount of information on Byzantine leaders. The most directly relevant titles are *Kitāb futūḥ al-Shām* by Abū Ismā'īl al-Azdī, and *Kitāb al-futūḥ* by Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī.¹² This literature is especially important for its depiction of the first encounters between Arab Muslims and Byzantines.

The best-known historical digests are *al-Akhhbār al-ṭiwāl* of Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī (d. 282/895) and the *Tārīkh* of al-Ya'qūbī (d. 283/897), which provide quick and rather syncretical exposés. Al-Dīnawarī's work is characterized by a quasi-exclusive interest in Iranian pre-Islamic and Islamic history. Al-Ya'qūbī reflects in his work an ecumenical mind dealing in the first part with pre-Islamic history and enumerating the Israelites, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Indians, the Greeks, the *Rūm*, the Chinese, and others. The second part of the work gives the history of the caliphate up to the year 259/872. It is arranged according to the reigns of caliphs.

The culminating point of Arab annalistic historiography was achieved in the work of Abū Ja'far b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*. Al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* is a monumental corpus that represents the ancient historical tradition

and preserves the broadest cross-section of earlier historical writing. It is an ambitious narrative that begins with creation and ends with the year 302/915. Al-Ṭabarī combined the history of creation and prophecy with the history of ancient nations, adding to them a biography of Muḥammad, a retelling of the conquests, and the history of the community down to his own time. His history became the preeminent example of the annalistic tradition. In the later period, the compilation of universal chronicles continued, notably, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārikh* of Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1232). *Al-Kāmil* is wide in its geographical range and covers events from creation to 628/1230–1231. It is particularly valuable for Muslim representation of Byzantium in the fourth/tenth, fifth/eleventh, and sixth/twelfth centuries. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 784/1382) wrote a universal history, the *Ibar*, which is particularly useful for the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries. The most notable historians of late Mamluk period are al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1470), and Ibn Iyās (d. 930/1524).

Material on Byzantium is also found in biographical dictionaries. Biographical notices began at a very early period in Arabic historiography. The genre is exemplified in the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), which lists distinguished companions and successors in order of seniority in Islam. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (663/1071) includes in his *Tārikh Baghdād* anyone of importance who has spent time in the city of Baghdad. Most important for our purposes is the topographical introduction that he provides of the Abbasid capital. The genre witnessed prolific periods, especially under the Mamluks. Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) produced a comprehensive dictionary of notables in all fields and ages, while the importance of *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya al-kubra* of al-Subkī (d. 769/1368) lies in having preserved an exchange of poems involving the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus Phocas.¹³

One of the most important bodies of sources in relation to the image of Byzantium and the Byzantines is the geographical literature. The geographers of the early "Iraqi" school included in

their treatment of the world a chapter on the Byzantines. Ibn Khurradadbeh (d. 300/911) composed *al-Masālik wa al-mamālik*, in which he furnishes itineraries that describe routes connecting provinces and towns. His work obtained wide circulation and was utilized by many scholars. Ibn Rusteh's *al-A'lāq al-nafīsa*, written between 290 and 300/903–913, includes the most detailed description of Constantinople written in Arabic up to his own days. Ibn al-Faḡīh al-Hamadhānī's *Kitāb al-buldān* was written around 290/903 and contains traditions and information of legendary character. Among the geographers of the "Balkhī" or classical school, Ibn Ḥawqal, in his *Ṣūrat al-arḍ* completed in c. 378/988, provides a full-length chapter on the lands of *al-Rūm*.

The one Arab-Muslim author to deal systematically with Byzantine history after the rise of Islam and until his own day was al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956), at once a historian, a geographer, a traveler, and a man of letters.¹⁴ In *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-jawhar*, the discussion of all nations known to the Muslims of the fourth/tenth century comprises almost one-half of the whole work. His *al-Tanbīh wa al-ishrāf* is a condensed and comprehensive account embracing different aspects of geographical and universal history. The political history is updated to the time of writing, which is 345/956.

Among the later important world geographies is the work of al-Idrīsī (d. 556/1166), completed at Palermo, under the patronage of the Norman king Roger II. The work was an important contribution to physical and descriptive geography. Yāqūt al-Ḥamwī (d. 626/1229) produced one of the most useful works in Arabic geographical literature—*Mu'jam al-buldān*, in which he collected, arranged, and systematized the topography of the world known to him. These works included information on the Byzantine empire, particularly physical descriptions of its capital, Constantinople. Among the most outstanding travel accounts of the later period are the *riḥlas* of Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217) and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 779/1377). Both travelers came from the Muslim West, a century and a half apart, and have left ac-

counts of their experiences in the lands of the Eastern Mediterranean, including Byzantium.

My sources also include works that, although they display a great deal of variety, all belong to the genre of *adab*. The term *adab* is hard to define, encompassing, as it does, various literal and metaphorical meanings. Traditionally *adab* has been used to refer to the profane literature as distinct from *ilm*, which sums up the religious sciences. It has been defined to include the "best" of what had been said in the form of verse, prose, aphorism, and anecdotes on every conceivable subject that an educated man, an *adīb*, is supposed to know. *Adab* also purports to deal with a wide range of problems of language, literature, and ethical and practical behavior.¹⁵ One of the most famous prose writers, author of works of *adab* and politico-religious polemics, was al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868–869). Several of his works include references to the Byzantines—notably, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, which is the first comprehensive study of animals in Arabic; *al-Bukḥalā'*, which is an attack on avarice; and *Risāla fī al-radd 'ala al-naṣāra* [Letter on Refuting the Christians], which he wrote at the order of Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/833–842).

Because anecdotes about the Byzantines are scattered in *adab* texts and are encountered in a fortuitous, almost accidental manner, the reader must consult a large number of *adab* texts and compilations. References to Byzantium are found, for instance, in the compilation of Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), *Uyūn al-akḥbār*, an anthology of literary reports drawn from many quarters; in *Kitāb al-Aghānī* of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 365/975), a work about poets and singers of the pre-Islamic Umayyad and Abbasid periods; and in the anthologies of al-Muḥassin b. 'Alī al-Tanūkhī (d. 384/994), which contain material for the social history of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries—namely, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara wa akḥbār al-mudhākara* and *al-Faraj ba'da al-shidda*. Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023) wrote his *Kitāb al-imtā' wa al-mu'ānasa* while he was a courtier at the Buyid court. He divided it into forty nights or ses-

sions, two of which, the sixth and fourteenth, allude to Byzantium. In later times, al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) compiled *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, an encyclopaedia covering the events of the years from the later Ayyubids through 700/1300. The most monumental of chancery guides, an encyclopaedia that draws on the works of preceding writers, is the *Subḥ al-a'shā fī šinā'at al-inshā* of al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418). His work covers the whole range of information needed by chancery clerks in the Mamluk sultanate.

The texts to be examined represent a broad spectrum of genres and styles developed over a long period of time. Considering the extent and variety of the sources consulted, a certain unevenness of coverage is virtually guaranteed. The danger of overlooking some bit of information or of attaching too much importance to some other is ever-present; some texts, authors, ideas, and images are bound to be omitted from this analysis.

The sources are disparate and unfold to reveal multiple images. Information about Byzantium is not immediately assimilated; first the layer of previous information already fixed in tradition needs to be pierced. Our authors and compilers depended on earlier "pretexts," and these intertextual references created a dynamic relationship between present and prior texts.¹⁶ Each text bears a whole network of articulated themes and assumptions whose meaning links up with other texts, genres, or topics of discourse. This is at the heart of the semiotic perspective that has disturbed traditional notions of authors as centered subjects in conscious control of their utterances. One important shift in medieval historiography has been the transformation of history from narration to representation, "a recognition that the past occurs only through the mediatory and mediating texts that it bequeaths and that, therefore, what is recovered is not as much the truth of the past as the images of itself that it produces, images conditioned, indeed determined, by its ambient and historically determinate, discourses."¹⁷ Critics have pointed to the complicated relationship between the claim to be telling the truth about the past and the conventional representations in

which such truths were expressed.¹⁸ History's postmodern anxiety over the status and meaning of reality is here circumvented by an awareness that this effort is directed toward disclosing a discourse—that we are trying to uncover a representation, not reality.

Yet another important issue concerns the audience, for the texts examined in this book belonged to the literature of the elite. The geographer al-Muqaddasī (d. 390/1000) makes the status of his readership clear when he declares: "I am writing for the administrator, the great merchant, and whomever is keen on learning."¹⁹ Since this literature maintained itself in the domain of the educated, its physical accessibility to general audiences was limited.²⁰ As a result, although some of its content must have filtered down to the masses, differences undoubtedly existed between the attitudes of the educated and the uneducated. The sole genre that might potentially furnish a record of the utterances and articulated attitudes of the illiterate masses toward Byzantium is the hero cycle. Such epics can be a valuable reflection of the ideals, aspirations, and concerns of ordinary people in Muslim societies. However, scholars agree that these texts are difficult to use because of uncertainties concerning the identities of the authors, the dates of composition, and the manuscript tradition itself. For instance, H. T. Norris states that the *sīra* of 'Antar was drafted between 1080 and 1400 but includes both early and late material. Bridget Connelly similarly remarks that "the authorship and the date of these works are generally obscure." Marius Canard, in a series of articles on *Sīrat Dhāt al-Himma*, concludes that the epic is formed of two distinct cycles differing in period and origin and that "it is impossible to give an exact date for the composition of the romance."²¹ Not only are these texts filled with additions and interpolations; they also do not exist in critical editions. There is no reason to doubt that as soon as these obstacles are surmounted, the epics will provide a great amount of material relevant to the popular mentality in the medieval Arab Muslim world. In the meantime, we must rely on the traces of certain

popular beliefs and attitudes that have survived in the works of the literati. In any event, all of our authors wrote with an exclusively Muslim audience in mind, and for most Muslims, reading or hearing a particular text or story was as close as they ever came to Byzantium. The texts had the effect not of challenging but of confirming and consolidating the prevailing conception of Byzantium. There was a complex dialectic of reinforcement "by which the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read, and this, in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers' experience."²²

A HISTORY OF ALTERITY

This book approaches *Homo Islamicus*²³ from various directions to study his mentality, his beliefs, and his own self-portrayal. Indeed, by studying the Muslim image of Byzantium, we learn about differences in cultural and social structures and in psychological systems. Although the conventional ideology that influenced the construction of the image may have been removed from reality, the points that clearly surprised the author and therefore show fundamental differences between the two worlds are of particular interest.

The problem of representation is complex. Questions about difference and the analysis-of-power hierarchies implicit in constructions of the "other" have been central to critiques of "Orientalism" initiated by Edward Said. Said emphasizes that "cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be." Moreover, the what and the how in the representation of things, while allowing for considerable individual freedom, are circumscribed and socially regulated. E. Sivan similarly wonders whether an image represents the expression of profound and individual attitudes or whether it adheres to stereotypes imposed by social consensus. The Byzantinist Hélène Ahrweiler also stresses that the theme of the "image of the Other" touches on

the history of "mentalités" above all else. As alterity presupposes identity, the two are fixed realities since they coexist and are subject to mutual interactions. It is an alterity of dialogue, even if it is simultaneously hostile. Alterity implicitly recognizes the other and the existence of a "terrain d'entente" between them. Yves Albert Dauge also talks about "altérité," which is positive, and "aliénété," which is negative. There is a distinction between the other considered as similar, accepted, and integrated—once modified—and the other rejected as inferior and incompatible. François Hartog describes this inherent complexity in the following way: to posit the other is to posit him as different, to posit that there are two terms *a* and *b* and that *a* is not *b*. However, this difference becomes interesting at the moment when *a* and *b* enter the same system: "Commence alors ce travail incessant et indéfini qui consiste à ramener l'autre au même." In the end, the other represents viable but alternative ways of thinking and acting.²⁴

From the very beginning of Arabic-Islamic historical consciousness, Byzantium served as one of the primary sites of otherness in contrast to which it constituted itself. In other words, Islam defined itself partly in relation to Byzantium's otherness. The Muslim image of Byzantium was frequently informed by the ideas, doctrines, and trends that ruled the culture at specific historical moments. Similarly, the attitudes of the Byzantines themselves also informed Muslim responses, including their creation of a certain image of Byzantium. A dependent correlation existed between the self-image of the Byzantines and that of the Muslims: one was in reciprocal contrast to the other. A kind of mirror image gave rise to the need to postulate the other to define and legitimate what one is to oneself. In many ways, the self-definition of the Arabs was implicitly connected to their way of relating to the Byzantines and the Byzantines' own self-definition. Quite often, the Byzantines are a foil for the emotional or psychological trials of the Arabs. Such a delineation, through a set of contrasts, was dependent on the Muslim self-image. This meant that all perception occurred through the

lenses of their own system of values and beliefs. Consequently, the image of the Byzantines cannot be dissociated from the image of the Muslims constructed by Arab Muslim authors. The two terms, *Byzantine* and *Muslim*, are often found in a relationship of opposition. A culture that differs is perceived as a negation of one set of values rather than as an expression of another system. This means that the literature is bound to be unrealistic in its omissions and representations.

THE TEMPORAL EVOLUTION OF PERCEPTION

The image of Byzantium in the Arabic-Islamic sources was not monolithic across the centuries. Images seem to have responded to changing internal, regional, and international political realities and may be narrated only by acknowledging and referring to the historical development of the Byzantine and Islamic states. In particular, we must take into account the persistent fluctuation of power between the two rivals if we are to understand the evolution of certain images, *topoi*, rhetorical figures, and other similar structures. The Muslims were themselves aware of the continuous changes that befall societies. Al-Tawhīdī, after dealing with this subject at length, concludes: "With each century, people acquire new habits and a new mentality that they did not possess before."²⁵ Images developed in conjunction with these new historical realities. Words, phrases, and formulas acquired new meanings in relation to the prevailing historical and cultural contexts. This book traces the image of Byzantium as a contextually construed evolution, responding to developments in the medieval Islamic milieu and reflected in a complex intertextuality. The image, shaped within the text, was used to enhance the image of its Muslim counterpart. Therefore, we witness the growth of a textual tradition on Byzantium that reflects purely internal concerns and that is independent of actual historical phenomena.

The corpus of written material containing references to the Byzantines continues in works in the ninth/fifteenth century. But

as early as the sixth/twelfth century, a certain traditional depiction of Byzantium and the Byzantines had been elaborated in the Arabic-Islamic sources. This literary tradition remained vibrant, with later writers freely adopting and adapting material from their predecessors. Later sources juxtaposed contemporary perceptions with earlier views, adapting their arguments, to a certain extent, to the established framework of set patterns, motifs, and polemical programs. A major characteristic of the later Arabic-Islamic sources is an approach that favored compilation and systematization. As a result, in a wide variety of sources, there is often duplication and reproduction from earlier works. An anecdote that first appeared in a third/ninth-century text will reappear, unchanged, in subsequent collections. Thus, while the gradual accumulation of new material provides evidence for historical change and an evolution in perception, continuity predominates in the later sources. One significant consequence of this is that individual contemporary authors might emphasize a particular aspect of Byzantium or bring out a new facet but still convey entrenched images culled from their own various sources. The upshot of all this is that the last centuries reveal slight modifications and alterations of the Muslim tradition on Byzantium as it had principally been elaborated by the Abbasid authors.

In what follows, the Arabic-Islamic representations of the Byzantine empire are considered in terms of a few salient configurations. The texts tended to emphasize, in a disproportionate way, certain discussions, themes, and topics. For each period in the relations between the two rival states, certain factors helped determine the content of the image presented. These factors include the nature of Muslim-Byzantine relations, the particular political and ideological concerns of the time, and the textual tradition located within a particular literary genre. Although this book examines eras during which particular traditions and views of the Byzantines seemingly prevailed, this does not mean that these same traditions and views were absent from earlier or later periods. Furthermore, this study is by no means

exhaustive, for many angles remain unexplored. Instead, I have deliberately chosen to focus on a few themes and a few aspects of a highly complex image.

NOTES

1. Marius Canard has elaborated on various aspects of these relations in a number of articles. See, for instance, "Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964): 3-56.
2. Non-Muslims who permanently resided in *dār al-islām* were given special status of indefinite duration called *'abd*, by which their lives and property were secured and they enjoyed religious tolerance. See Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Law of Nations: Shaybānī's Siyar* (Baltimore, 1966), 17-18.
3. D. Obolenski, "Byzantine Frontier Zones and Cultural Exchanges," *Actes du XIVème Congrès International des Études Byzantines* (September 1971): 303-313.
4. Muḥammad Nūr al-Dīn Afāya, *al-Gharb al-mutakbayyal: Ṣuwar al-ākhar fī al-fīkr al-'arabī al-islāmī al-waṣīṭ* (Beirut, 2000), 37; see also Tarif Khalidi, "Islamic Views of the West in the Middle Ages," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 5 (1995): 31-42. Standard works on East-West perceptions include Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1960); R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1962); Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York, 1982); and more recently, David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto, eds., *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of the Other* (New York, 1999). On Orientalism, in addition to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), see Hichem Djait, *Europe and Islam*, trans. Peter Heinegg (Berkeley, 1985); Maxime Rodinson, *La fascination de l'Islam: Les étapes du regard occidental sur le monde musulman* (Paris, 1980). On Christian-Muslim dialogue, see William M. Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London, 1991); Willem Bijlrfeld, "Christian-Muslim Studies: Islamic Studies and the Future of Christian-Muslim Encounter," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad (Gainseville, 1995), 13-40.
5. See, for instance, John Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam,"

- dard ingredients"; in "The Crusading Stratum in the Arabic Hero Cycle," in *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Leiden, 1993), 147-161.
22. Said, *Orientalism*, 94.
23. In imitation of Alexander Kazhdan's *Homo Byzantinus*. See A. P. Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, 1982).
24. See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993), 95; Emmanuel Sivan, *L'Islam et la croisade* (Paris, 1968), 6; Hélène Ahrweiler, "L'image de l'autre et les mécanismes de l'altérité," *XVIIe Congrès international des sciences historiques: Rapport I* (Stuttgart, 1985), 60-66; Yves Albert Dauge, *Le Barbare: recherches sur la conception romaine de la barbarie et de la civilisation* (Brussels, 1981), 315; François Hartog, *Le Miroir d'Hérodote: essai sur la représentation de l'autre* (Paris, 1980), 224.
25. Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *Kitāb al-imtā' wa al-mu'ānasa*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad al-Zayn (Cairo, 1953), pt. 3:3.

The Encounter with Byzantium

Nomenclature is the first problem that confronts the scholar searching Arabic sources for references to the Byzantines. In part, the confusion stems from Byzantine imperial ideology, for the basic principle behind Byzantine political doctrines is the idea that theirs was the sole legitimate empire. To the Byzantines, their empire was none other than the Roman empire, perfected through Christianity, and they admitted no distinction or discontinuity from antiquity.¹ Thus, their political ideology proclaimed the empire's universal character, founded, as it was, on their Roman heritage and consolidated by their ecumenical Christian ideology. Of course, this ideology was not expressed in precisely the same tone throughout the thousand years of Byzantine history but took on different shades and textures in response to changes in the political circumstances of a given era. During the iconoclastic period, for example, the Byzantine ideal stressed national solidarity to the point of pulling away from Greco-Roman tradition. From the mid-tenth to the mid-eleventh centuries, as the empire reached its apogee, the Byzantines attached themselves to a Hellenic past as a way of affirming their cultural superiority over the rest of the world.²

By and large, Arab Muslim observers at the empire's periph-

ery accepted this projected, larger-than-life image and viewed the history of the Byzantines as an extension of the histories of ancient Greece and the Roman empire. This led Arab authors to mingle and confuse the names by which they referred to the Byzantines: the term *Rūm* was used to refer interchangeably to the Romans, the Byzantines, and the Christian Melkites, and, later, *al-Rūm* also came to signify one of the subordinate lines of the Muslim Seljuk family in Anatolia. On occasion, *al-Rūm* was used to refer to the ancient Greeks, although the predominant term in that context was *al-Yūnāniyyūn/Yūnān*, a name derived from the Greeks' biblical name: Yonan (Genesis 2:10).³ The *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* of Šā'id al-Andalusī (d. 426/1070) exemplifies some of these usages when describing the Romans in their capital: "The fifth nation is that of the *Rūm*, whose capital was the great Rome. It is a great nation with magnificent kings who ruled until the coming of Constantine, son of Helen." Šā'id then refers to the Christianization of the empire by Constantine, who "built a city on the gulf, known as al-Qusṭanṭiniyya, in the middle of the land of the *Yūnān* which has remained the capital until this day." The same author uses *Rūm* when mentioning the Christians living and working in Baghdad.⁴ However, most often, in this work and elsewhere, the term *Rūm* refers to the Byzantines, and close scrutiny of the particular context makes the intended meaning manifest.

In *Murūj al-dhahab*, al-Mas'ūdī lists various opinions concerning the origin of the *Rūm* and of their name. According to some, the *Rūm* derived their name from the city of Rome; the name of the city was subsequently Arabized, and whoever inhabited it came to be called *Rūm*. Al-Mas'ūdī adds that the *Rūm* called themselves Rominos, a name that the people of the Muslim-Byzantine frontier also used when referring to the Byzantines. He then gives another opinion that attributes the name to one of the ancestors of the *Rūm*, providing two lineages that trace the genealogy of the *Rūm* much as Arab tribes traditionally delineated theirs. Like other Arab authors, al-Mas'ūdī

attempts to fit the *Rūm* into the biblical ethnology found in the tenth chapter of Genesis, which lists Noah's three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japhet—and the lines of filiation of the various nations ascribed to them. Although a number of Arab authors agree that the Arabs are one of the nations descended from Shem, they disagree about the lineage of the Byzantines. Some ascribe them to Japhet, thus making them kinsmen to the Slavs and Turks, while others attribute them to Shem, making them kinsmen to the Arabs. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1071), for instance, situates the *Rūm* among the descendants of Shem but also echoes the tradition according to which the ancient Greeks and the Byzantines were descended from Japhet. Through Abū Hurayra, we hear of a tradition that states that Shem was the father of the Arabs, the Persians, and the Byzantines; he adds, "and the good resides among them."⁵ This tradition reflects the grudging respect that traditionists rendered to the Persians and Byzantines. At the same time, such genealogical speculation is also tied to a linear view of history "in which all communities are built on a prophetic tradition that is actually derived from Adam."⁶ This perspective is not unique to Islam but is common to all of the Abrahamic religions. Discussions of the mythical origins of various nations take on a specifically Islamic, or Arab, hue when the attempts of genealogists to apply concepts of tribal organization universally are considered. Implicit in such attempts is the belief or desire to believe that, while all peoples originate from a common trunk that ramified in different directions, the descendants of Shem occupy a preeminent position.⁷ Consequently, the emergence of a tradition among various authors that includes the Byzantines in the same family as the Arabs constitutes quite an acknowledgment on the part of a society that came to see itself as superior to all others.

Nevertheless, the Arab authors were aware that the Byzantine empire, which had never been ethnically homogeneous, was composed of a mixture of peoples. Ibn al-Faqīh states that the inhabitants of *bilād al-Rūm* are mostly *Rūm* and Slavs while, ac-

according to al-Mas'ūdī, many *Rūs* (Russians) had joined the *Rūm* as had the Armenians, the Bulgars (who are Slavs), the *Ṣaqālība*, and the Pecheneg (who are Turks).⁸

Rūm is not the only term employed by Arab Muslim writers to describe the Byzantines, as well as various other related groups and peoples. Also found in the Arabic sources are *'ilj*, a derogatory term very close to the Greek concept of barbaroi,⁹ and *Banū al-Aṣfar*, the etymology of which occasioned much discussion among the Arabs. Ibn al-Faḳīh offered the following explanation. The king of *Rūm* died leaving no one in the entire Byzantine empire who was fit to rule except a woman. The Byzantines decided, therefore, to take up as ruler the first man to enter their territory through adjacent mountain passes. A runaway Ethiopian slave appeared, and the Byzantines forced him to marry their queen and assume the throne. The couple subsequently had a son who was named *al-Aṣfar*, the yellow one, because he was of mixed race.¹⁰ Thus, not only are the Byzantines of Ibn al-Faḳīh's day made out to be the descendants of a black slave, but a randomly chosen runaway slave is deemed more fit to rule the empire than any of its male or female citizens. To the Arabs, for whom the centrality of blood was paramount, a person's nature and worth were closely tied to the worthiness of his or her stock. By denying the Byzantines a line to the past or, more insulting still, by allowing them no more than an inferior past, Ibn al-Faḳīh made a statement about their worthiness—and found them wanting. More common in our sources, although less imaginative, is Ibn Qutayba's explanation: the ancestor of the *Rūm* had very yellow skin and thus his descendants came to be called *Banū al-Aṣfar*.¹¹ Other authors rejected *al-Aṣfar* as designating color or race and saw in it a name: Aṣfar, the grandson of Esau.¹²

BYZANTIUM IN THE QUR'ĀN: SŪRAT AL-RŪM

Reference to *al-Rūm* occurs in the Islamic text that is both first in chronology and axial in significance: namely, the Qur'ān. The

Qur'ān is not only Islam's primary source with regard to theological and legal questions; it is also a daily presence in the life of the community of believers. Hence, the importance of the reference to the Byzantines in this Muslim canonical text. The opening verses of *Sūrat al-Rūm* (XXX, 1–5) read as follows:

Alif Lām Mīm (1) The Greeks have been vanquished (2) in the nearer part of the land; and, after their vanquishing, they shall be victors (3) in a few years. To God belongs the Command before and after, and on that day the believers shall rejoice (4) in God's help; God helps whomsoever He will; and He is All-mighty, the All-compassionate (5).

These verses concern the Byzantine-Persian wars, which were fought during the early part of the first/seventh century. At the time of the accession of Emperor Heraclius (A.D. 610–641), the Persians were menacing Byzantium from the east, and, in A.D. 611, they undertook the conquest of Syria, capturing Antioch, the main city of the eastern Byzantine provinces and, later, Damascus. In A.D. 614, Jerusalem was also captured and pillaged. The loss of the holy city deeply shocked the Byzantines, and the effect was compounded by the transport of the relic of the true cross to Ctesiphon. But the Persians' advance did not stop there: between A.D. 617 and 619, they occupied Egypt. Heraclius eventually took the offensive, conducting campaigns against the Persians. In A.D. 627, he finally defeated the Persian army near Nineveh, and the Persian king, Chosroes II, was dethroned and killed. The provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt and the true cross were returned to the Byzantine empire. The magnitude of these wars and their significance was not lost on anyone, for they reopened the whole question of frontiers and allegiances in Arabia.¹³ The Arabs of the peninsula were caught up in the tensions between the superpowers of the day. The wars, as reflected in the exegetical literature, seem to have led to a division within the Quraysh—the clan of the Prophet Muhammad—separating those who thought that the Persians would win from those who were counting on a Byzantine victory. The

Qur'ānic commentators saw these opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm* as *ayāt bayyināt*, a sign that the Qur'ān was God-sent, because of the effective accomplishment of the prophecy contained within them. Many people are said to have converted to Islam as a consequence.¹⁴

Several Qur'ānic scholars have alluded to the difficulty in reading and interpreting these verses, pointing to their problematic vocalization, which has the potential to change the meaning and the dependent historical explanation.¹⁵ The greatest challenge in reading these verses concerns the forms of the verb *ghalaba* (to vanquish) found within them. The majority of the commentaries read the verb in the second verse in the passive voice, *ghulibat al-Rūm* (the *Rūm* were vanquished), and the verb in the third verse in the active voice, *sa-yaghlibūn* (they will vanquish). There is, however, a strong variant reading that reverses the verb forms: here, the first verb is in the active voice, *ghalabat al-Rūm* (the *Rūm* were victorious), while the second is passive, *sa-yughlabūn* (they will be vanquished). The vowelizing of the verbs is crucial, as it changes the meaning and interpretation of the verses in a fundamental way.

One of the earliest extant commentaries, that of Mujāhid (d. 104/722), provides the following explanation: "He mentioned the victory of Persia over the *Rūm* and the victory of the *Rūm* over Persia and the rejoicing of the believers for God's assistance of *ahl al-kitāb* [people of the Book] over *ahl al-awthān* [idol worshippers]."¹⁶ Muqātil b.Sulaymān (d. 150/767) states:

The Persians defeated the *Rūm* in the nearer part of the land . . . and they—meaning the *Rūm*—after their defeat, will be victorious over the Persians in a few years. . . . Persia had defeated the *Rūm*, and the *kuffār* [nonbelievers] of Mecca rejoiced, saying that the Persians, like us, do not have a [holy] book, and they have defeated the *Rūm*, who are people of the Book like you, and so we will defeat you, the way the Persians defeated the *Rūm*. . . . On the day of Badr, the Muslims triumphed over the *kuffār* of Mecca, and [at the same time] the news reached them that the *Rūm* had triumphed over the Persians and the Muslims rejoiced for that.¹⁷

The Kufan grammarian, Abū Zakariyyā al-Farrā (d. 207/822), provides the following similar explanation: "The Persians were victorious over the *Rūm*, and the Muslims were saddened while the Meccan polytheists rejoiced, because the Persians worship idols . . . but the Muslims were inclined toward the *Rūm* because they are [also] people of the Book."¹⁸

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl al-qur'ān* was "the first major work in the development of traditional Qur'anic sciences,"¹⁹ constituting a standard text on which later commentators drew. Being the earliest complete Qur'ān commentary, it contained "the compilation and material arrangement of the first two centuries and a half of Muslim exegesis."²⁰ Al-Ṭabarī cites material found in the standard authorities, noting even insignificant variants. He reproduces the exact chains of authorities, hence the repetition, at times, of identical content received through different chains. In his classic interpretation of the opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm*, he sums up the various interpretations given earlier and commonly accepted by the early fourth/tenth century. His interpretation is important because later exegetes continued to rely on al-Ṭabarī's text:

The *qurrā'* [Qur'ān readers] differed as to the reading: the majority of the *qurrā'* of the *amṣār* read it as *ghulibat al-Rūm* . . . in the sense that the Persians defeated the *Rūm*. This has been related on the authority of Ibn 'Umar and Abū Sa'īd.²¹ . . . I heard Ibn 'Umar reading "*Alif Lām Mīm ghalabat al-Rūm*," and he was asked, "O Abū 'Abdallāh, over what were they victorious?" He said: "Over the countryside of *al-Shām*." The only correct reading for us is *ghulibat al-Rūm* and no other reading is acceptable, for it enjoys the authoritative consensus of the *qurrā'*. This being the case, the *ta'wīl*²² of the wording is thus: The Persians defeated the *Rūm* (in the nearer land) from the land of *al-Shām* to that of Persia . . . but the *Rūm* will defeat the Persians subsequent to their earlier defeat (in a few years, for it is God's will) before their victory and after, on either occasion. . . . And on the day the *Rūm* defeat the Persians, the believers will rejoice for God's victory over the polytheists [*mushrikūn*] and for the victory of the *Rūm* over

the Persians. . . . This is the victory of the believers over the polytheists at Badr. . . . On the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, who said: "The Muslims favored a victory by the *Rūm* because they are people of the Book, whilst the polytheists [of Mecca] favored the victory of the Persians, because they are idol worshippers. They mentioned this to Abū Bakr, who, in turn, repeated it to the Prophet, who said, 'They will be defeated.' Abū Bakr reiterated these words to the polytheists who responded: 'Let us have a deadline; if you win, you will have so-and-so and if we do, we will get so-and-so.' They decided on five years, which passed, and still the Persians were not defeated. Abū Bakr mentioned this fact to the Prophet who told him, 'Make the deadline ten years. . . .' And so the *Rūm* were defeated and were later victorious. . . ." Sufyān said: "I heard that they won on the same day as the battle of Badr." . . . On the authority of 'Ikrima: "The *Rūm* and the Persians met in battle in the nearer part of the land; it was said that the nearer part of the land was Adhri'āt, where the *Rūm* were defeated. When the news reached the Prophet and the Companions in Mecca, it troubled them, for the Prophet hated the victory of the ignorant [*ummiyūn*]²³ Mazdeans [*Majūs*] over the Byzantine people of the Book. The nonbelievers of Mecca rejoiced and, meeting the Companions of the Prophet, said, 'You are people of a Book and so are the Christians, while we are *ummiyūn*. Our brothers, the Persians, defeated your brothers and, if you are to battle us, we will defeat you. . . .' And so, God sent down these verses. . . . Abū Bakr al-Siddiq went to the nonbelievers, and said, 'Are you rejoicing for the victory of your brothers over our brothers? Do not . . . for, by God, the *Rūm* will defeat the Persians, so have we been told by our prophet.'" . . . On the authority Qatāda: "When God sent down these verses, the Muslims believed their God. . . . And God made the *Rūm* victorious over the Persians on the day of Hudaybiyya. The Muslims rejoiced, [both] for their treaty and for the victory of *ahl al-kitāb* over the *Majūs*." . . . As for those who read *ghalabat al-Rūm*. . . . On the authority of Abū Sa'īd: "On the day of the victory of the *Rūm* over the Persians, the believers were pleased, so the verse was sent down. . . . On the day of Badr, the *Rūm* were victorious over the Persians, so the Muslims rejoiced, and God sent these verses. . . . As for the reading, *sa-yughlabūn*, the meaning is thus: following their victory over Persia, they will

be defeated by the Muslims, in order for the interpretation to be correct."²⁴

As may be seen, al-Ṭabarī lists various traditions when he explains the opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm*. The majority of these traditions, which rely on different chains of authorities, repeat practically the same content. This is because all of them may ultimately be traced back to Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687), who has been acclaimed as the "most venerable exponent" of *tafsīr*,²⁵ his client, 'Ikrimah (d. 105/723), from the school of Mecca; and Qatāda (d. 118/736), from the Iraqi school of Ibn Mas'ūd. Thus, the traditional reading—by far the most prevalent in commentaries both antecedent and subsequent to al-Ṭabarī—places the vowel *u* over the letter *ghain*, rendering it *ghulibat*, in the passive voice. The second verb is in the active voice: *sayaghlibūn*. The basic explanation is provided in al-Ṭabarī, who reiterates earlier commentaries, and is repeated in most other commentaries:²⁶ the *Rūm* were defeated by the Persians but will soon triumph over them, and on that day, the day when the people of the Book defeat the pagan Persians, the believers will rejoice. In the commentaries, the believers are taken to be the followers of the Prophet—in other words, the Muslims. This reading reflects an approving view of the Byzantines since the expectation is that a later Byzantine victory will give the Muslims reason to rejoice. The early commentaries are all unanimous in their interpretation of these verses and, thus, in this favorable perspective toward Byzantium.

The commentaries adhering to this traditional reading and interpretation explain the believers' joy at a Byzantine victory in religious terms: the "believers shall rejoice" because the victory signifies the triumph of the Book over polytheism. This explanation is also found in the major work on *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), that of 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī al-Naysabūrī (d. 468/1075).²⁷ Thus, the Byzantines' monotheism is the determining factor behind the Muslims' favor.

Al-Ṭabarī mentions, on the authority of Ibn 'Umar and Abū

Sa'īd, a variant reading that has the potential of drastically changing the meaning of these verses. This reading vocalizes *ghalaba* as *ghalabat al-Rūm . . . sa-yughlabūn*, which means that the Byzantines defeated the Persians but will later be defeated by the Muslims, the real cause for Muslim joy. Al-Ṭabarī, however, gives his own judgment about the validity and probability of all these interpretations. As noted above, he states his opinion clearly and categorically: "The only correct reading for us is *ghulibat al-Rūm*, and no other reading is acceptable." The variant reading of these verses represents what Andrew Rippin describes as "a conscious attempt to come to grips with an obscure passage by alternative grammatical constructions and lexical variations."²⁸ Thus, variant readings are intended to support differing interpretations. The alternative reading of these verses seeks to explain them by denying Byzantium's triumph and emphasizing, instead, an eventual Muslim victory. This variant interpretation, with its negative undertones regarding the Byzantines, developed later and reflects growing animosity between Byzantium and Islam. But until the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh century, the exegetical tradition portrayed the *Rūm* as monotheists who would ultimately vanquish the polytheists. The Byzantines and the Muslims were clearly on the same side, and the Muslims would rejoice at a future Byzantine victory over the pagan Persians. Thus, the central religious, or axial text of Islam—namely, the Qur'ān—or, rather, the exegetical tradition attached to it adopted a position that saw the Byzantines as political and ideological allies. Upholding monotheism and its practitioners was indeed crucial at the earliest stage for the Islamic *umma*.

The variant reading of the Qur'anic verses of the *sūra* (*ghalabat . . . sa-yughlabūn*), which may be mainly traced to Ibn 'Umar, promises that the Muslims will ultimately defeat the Byzantines. In the course of the eleventh century, this variant line of exegetical interpretation, which denied any previous ideological affiliation between Islam and Byzantium, predominated. For example, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), the

great Mu'tazilite theologian, explains the Qur'anic verse ("and on that day the believers shall rejoice") in light of contemporaneous events. Rejecting the notion that the first/seventh-century Muslims had any reason to celebrate a Byzantine victory over Persia due to a shared monotheism, he writes: "Why is it that the believers shall rejoice at the victory of one group of polytheists over another . . . ? The answer is that God will bring victory to the believers by bringing about the humiliation of one group of polytheists by another such group."²⁹

In *al-Kashshāf 'an haqā'iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl*, the most important Mu'tazilī *tafsīr*, al-Zamakhsharī (d. 528/1144) also departs from the traditional reading by reversing the forms of the verbs. His interpretation is that the *Rūm* were victorious and that they, in turn, will be defeated by the Muslims after only a few years. Abū Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344) includes the variant reading of Ibn 'Umar and similarly explains that, after a certain period, the Muslims will triumph over the *Rūm*. Al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), who relies on al-Zamakhsharī, also includes the variant reading in his famous commentary, writing: "It has been read *ghalabat* . . . *sa-yughlabūn* to mean that the *Rūm* were victorious over the countryside of *al-Shām* and the Muslims will vanquish them. In the ninth year . . . the Muslims invaded and conquered some of their lands." He includes this variant, alongside the traditional interpretation, without any further discussion as to its veracity. It is as if the two interpretations, the traditional and the radical, have equal weight.³⁰

From the fifth/eleventh to the seventh/thirteenth centuries, commentators adopted the new exegetical emphasis in an attempt to circumvent the jubilation of the believers. Al-Zamakhsharī proposes that the continuous warfare between the Byzantines and the Persians would weaken them, while strengthening Islam; hence, the joy of the believers. The Sufi 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) adheres to the traditional reading but hastens to qualify his assessment by saying that "the Muslims rejoiced for the victory of the *Rūm* over the Persians, even though unbelief unites them." Nonetheless, the

Rūm are somewhat superior, since they have singled out a number of prophets for their devotion. For al-Qurtūbī (d. 671/1272), the believers' joy could merely be the consequence of a natural Muslim preference for the victory of a weaker enemy over one that is more threatening. For al-Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), their joy is uniquely connected to the Muslim victory over the polytheists at Badr.³¹

This new line of explanation reflects the emergence of two cardinal differences in relation to earlier thought. First, the Byzantines are now characterized as polytheists despite their initial and traditional depiction as monotheists. Second, the jubilation of the believers no longer stems from a foreknowledge of Byzantine victory. In commentaries dating from the sixth/twelfth century onward, the "rejoicing" is explained by a combination of reasons: because the polytheists (that is, the Persians and the Byzantines) were battling one another; because the Muslims were victorious over their enemies; because the Byzantine victory coincided with a Muslim victory; or because the victory, predicted by the Prophet, testified to his truthfulness. Some of these points appear on Abū Ḥayyān's list of explanations for the joy of the believers, which includes the victory of the *Rūm* over the Persians, the victory of the Muslims over their enemies, the victory as evidence for the Prophet's veracity, and the likelihood that the two oppressors would annihilate each other. Muḥammad al-Naysābūrī (d. 550/1155) gives the following reasons for the believers' jubilation: first, the victory confirms the Prophet's promise; second, the weakness of Persia strengthens the Arabs; third, the Persians are not *ahl al-kitāb*, whereas the *Rūm* are Christians and have a gospel; and finally, al-Bayḍāwī explains the "rejoicing" in terms of the victory of monotheists over polytheists, the confirmation of Muslim truthfulness and as a device to strengthen Muslims belief in their religion.³²

These lists clearly represent attempts to depreciate the traditional explanation of the believers' joy, an explanation that tended to emphasize the shared monotheism of the Muslims and

the Byzantines. At this point in time, a rationale that had once gone virtually unchallenged is now only one reason among many. A change in emphasis has taken place whereby even the other reasons given completely ignore the ties that bind Islam and Byzantium in favor of explanations that focus exclusively on Islam. In particular, the connection between the believers' joy and the fulfillment of the Prophet's prediction is given added credence.

It is obvious that Qur'anic exegetes adopted interpretations negative to Byzantium as the empire became increasingly involved in an adversarial relationship with the Islamic state. Thus, 'Abd al-Jabbār, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Qurṭubī, Abū Ḥayyān, and others provide more elaborate and contorted explanations to obscure the early complimentary image of Byzantium in the opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm*. The prominence that the variant reading came to achieve in the rational commentaries (*tafsīr bi al-ra'ī*) must be linked to the new defensive position taken by the Muslims during the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries when the Muslim community was divided and weak.

It is true, however, that the variant reading is never standing on its own, as the traditionally more accepted reading is always juxtaposed side by side with it. Working as they were within a tradition, the commentators reiterated the traditional reading and interpretation. Indeed, even though the individual scholar could support or emphasize a particular interpretation as a result of the historical circumstances of his time or simply personal inclination reflecting the prevalent dominant ideology, he, nevertheless, was in a continuous dialogue with the tradition. Because of this entrenched tradition, the exegetical literature took centuries to turn the Byzantines into an enemy. In other Arabic literary genres, the notion of the Byzantines as a main rival emerged earlier. In any event, the earlier exegetical traditions depict the Byzantines as monotheists and, by extension, as political allies. Upholding monotheism and its practitioners was crucial, at this early stage, for the Islamic *umma*.

EARLY CONTACTS: BYZANTINE MILITARY LEADERS

Military encounters against the Byzantines heightened the Arabs' consciousness of ethnic unity and brought them face to face with a formidable enemy. These encounters and the hope of defeating the Byzantines were the subject of Umayyad poetry, such as the following verse by the poet Jarīr in praise of the Umayyad prince Mu'āwiya b. Hishām:

On the day when his victory brought the necks of the *Rūm* under
his yoke,
Glad tidings to all who live in lowlands and highlands.³³

In spite of an increased sense of separation, the Arabs' special affinity with the Byzantines are reflected in the verse of one tribal poet:

Though you hate us, yet the *Rūm* are your ancestors;
And the *Rūm* bear no hatred toward the Arabs.³⁴

One Muslim tradition promised Muḥammad's followers the conquest of Syria, stating: "I have been given the keys of Syria." However, an awareness of the primary obstacle—Byzantine strength—is reflected in a number of traditions, such as the one attributed to a Companion of the Prophet, in which he asks: "But how can we possibly gain Syria while it has the 'horned' Byzantines well established in it?" One contemporary is supposed to have said: "Does Muḥammad think that fighting the *Banū al-Aṣfar* is child play?"³⁵ But the Muslims' rapid conquest of Syria proved the traditions to be correct and brought the conquerors face to face with Byzantium's leaders.

Byzantine behavior in Syria was the subject of sharp criticism in the Muslim texts, which contain specific accusations of wrongdoing. The word most often used in such discussions is *ẓulm*, which, as used in the *Qur'ān*, may be broadly defined as "misdeed." Later, its usage becomes increasingly specialized as it takes on a stronger connotation of injustice and oppression.

According to most of the early Arabic dictionaries, it means "putting a thing in a place not its own"—hence, "acting in whatsoever way one pleases in the disposing of the property of another" and also "transgressing the proper limit."³⁶ The Byzantine government in Syria was an "oppressor" in the sense that it transgressed the proper limits, took the property of its subjects, and thus harmed them. Another synonym for *ẓulm* is *ṭughyān* (tyranny), which is derived from the same root as *ṭāghīya*, one of the terms used to refer to the Byzantine emperors. The opposite of *ẓulm* is *ʿadl* (justice), and both terms are used in the broadest possible sense to include moral and religious values. Islamic concepts of government required that the deeds and actions of the rulers comply with the utterances, commands, prohibitions, and injunctions of the Prophet. The most laudable attribute that a ruler could possess was equity, and his primary function was the administration of justice under the guidance of the Qurʾān and *sunna*.³⁷

Justice, as a political and social ideal, retained a prominent place in Islamic theories of political organization. The focus on it in the Qurʾān reflects a deep-seated conviction that justice is the natural and necessary basis of all human society.³⁸ A proper appreciation of this point is essential before approaching criticisms, by Muslim authors, of many aspects of the administration of justice under Byzantine rule. Invariably, the Byzantine administration in Syria is depicted as having degenerated into an unjust and tyrannical mechanism, and Byzantine practice is made to stand in sharp contrast to Muslim conduct and principles.

Thus, the *ẓulm* of the Byzantine government in Syria provides a foil for the righteousness of the new community. Indeed, the inhabitants of Fihl bluntly say as much to the Muslims: "You are more preferable to us than the Byzantines, even though they are Christians, for you keep your word and you are more just and better governors." The defeated Byzantine armies leaving Fihl confirm this assessment; they say that, unlike the Muslims, they are guilty of deception and intolerance. Moreover, "we drink

wine and commit unlawful deeds [*ḥarām*], we revoke our oath and we act unjustly.”³⁹ The Byzantine defeat is partially explained by means of a populist view that saw the Arabs as the instrument of God’s punishment. Sinfulness provides the abstract theological explanation for the Byzantine debacle.

Criticisms of the corrupt Byzantine élite prepared the way for its replacement by a new self-righteous religious élite. The Muslim sources include a whole collection of *topoi* intended to stress the piety of the Muslim protagonists in contrast to their Byzantine predecessors.⁴⁰ One such passage is found in Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī and in al-Ṭabarī:

Yes, they [the Muslims] are monks during the night and abstainers during the day; if their king steals, they have his hand cut off and, if anyone commits adultery, he is stoned. . . . The great patrician answered: “If I did not fear the anger of the great king, I would ask them for peace so that I may be saved and enter their religion.”⁴¹

As the Muslim authors assessed and judged the basic conceptual differences between two political ideologies—namely, the early Muslim caliphate and Byzantine kingship—their disapprobation was not limited to specific acts of injustice. Instead, they extended their comparison to include the men—the Muslim caliphs and the Byzantine emperors—as well as their offices, always to the detriment of Byzantium. Mu‘ādh b. Jabal was critical of the hierarchical organization of the Byzantine power structure and also of the elaborate ceremonial that distanced the rulers from the population. He emphasized that a sense of justice was a prerequisite for legitimate rule, while its absence disqualified any ruler. Mu‘ādh told the Byzantines:

If your king is Heraclius, our king is God . . . and our *amīr* is one among us whom we confirm only if he rules according to our Book and to the *sunna* of our prophet, peace be on him. Otherwise, we remove him. If he [the *amīr*] steals, his hand is cut; if he commits adultery, he is flogged; and if he curses a commoner, the

commoner can curse him back. . . . He is not removed from us, does not treat us haughtily and is just.⁴²

Mu'ādh was criticizing the Byzantine emperors and governors for their temporal perspective, their distance from their subjects, their arrogance, and their injustice. Byzantine rule, in his opinion, was inferior to Islamic rule, which tended strongly toward egalitarianism in the earliest period. Unlike the Byzantine emperor, the caliph was supposed to be approached as a simple mortal, equal in all ways to any other Muslim. The Muslim commander, Khālīd b. al-Walīd (d. 21/642), told the Byzantine commander, Vahan: "Thank God, who made our prince a man like us, so that if he claims that he is our *malik* [king] we remove him, and we do not see him as having greater merit than any Muslim." While identifying and condemning the reprehensible qualities of Byzantine leaders, the authors of our texts also indicate Muslim attitudes toward justice and government. Thus, the criticisms inherent in these texts may be recognized as exemplifying the early Muslims' leveling tendencies. The Muslims' notion of justice as a crucial element in the assurance of stable rule placed the unjust and corrupt Byzantine leaders in a category quite distanced from their Muslim counterpart. Later Islamic political ideology would witness the creation of the myth of the early Muslim caliphate as the golden age of Islam, with strong emphasis on the concept of *'adāla* (justice) as the golden mean.⁴³

The texts supply specific accusations concerning Byzantine behavior in Syria that remind us of the words of the Byzantine soldiers retreating from Fihl. Al-Azdī, who was the source for that account, elsewhere describes the disorderliness of the Byzantine soldiers, who mistreated Syrian civilians and despoiled their property. The Christian inhabitants accused them of slaughtering their sheep and of robbing them, while their superior officers neglected their duty and instead drank wine and committed adultery. Such accounts emphasize the greed and outward cruelty of the powerful Byzantines, whose misdeeds were seemingly left unpunished.

A particular case, reported by al-Azdī, involves one of the Byzantine generals, who confiscated sheep belonging to a local Christian and distributed the rest to his companions. The owner sent his wife and daughter to complain to the commander about the behavior of his men. However, instead of correcting the injustice, the women were raped, the son killed when he tried to interfere, and the father had his hand cut off. This sequence of tyrannical actions perpetrated by Byzantine officers in Syria warranted the almost desperate reaction of Vahan, the general commander of the Byzantine armies in Syria. Vahan was said to have been shocked by the comportment of the Byzantine generals, declaring himself innocent of their crimes. Unable to dispense justice because all of his commanders supported such transgressions, he exclaimed "in his tongue":

How strange and odd! Why do the mountains not collapse, why does the sea not burst out, why does the land not vanish and why does the sky not shudder at this sin which you have perpetrated? . . . As for me, I swear that I am innocent of your deeds.⁴⁴

The Arab authors make a clear distinction between the noble and righteous conduct of Vahan and that of the other Byzantine military leaders, at once ruthless and unjust. Vahan is depicted as an honest man horrified at the actions of his officers; he warns them that, if they believe in a God that protects and gives justice to the oppressed, they may be sure of punishment. Distancing himself from such behavior, Vahan declared himself innocent of their crimes.⁴⁵ Vahan's exemplary conduct and moral superiority found resonance at a higher level of the Byzantine hierarchy. In a letter to Vahan, the emperor Heraclius declared that the Muslim victory was due to the shameful deeds and injustice that had taken place under Byzantine rule. Ibn A'tham relates the instructions that Heraclius supposedly gave to General Vahan to govern his future behavior:

You should be just and compassionate toward your kinsmen. . . . Honor the eminent, yet do not disdain the common people. You

should be like a father and a brother to all of them. You have seen that the Arabs were victorious because they accept God's commandments and consult the wise among them. I entrust you with what no king has ever enjoined, so beware of disobeying me and beware of following the whims of your soul, for this would be the greatest of catastrophes.⁴⁶

This plea for compassion and justice is manifestly self-serving, highlighting as it does the contrast between the unjust behavior of the Byzantines and the rectitude of the Muslims, who accepted the commandments and consulted their sages.⁴⁷ It is also consequential because Heraclius is clearly not implicated in the injustice committed by the Byzantines. He is detached from his unworthy and treacherous following as he criticizes the defects of his own regime. The instructions attributed to him place him at a higher level as a conscientious leader enjoining his generals to rule with vigilance and justice. These references to the emperor are neither unique nor fortuitous, for Heraclius enjoyed a position of unparalleled favor in the Arabic-Islamic sources.

AN EXEMPLARY RULER: EMPEROR HERACLIUS

The corpus of Islamic lore on Heraclius is considerable. Heraclius's importance for the Muslims stemmed from the fact that he was contemporaneous with the Prophet Muḥammad and was the leader of the reconsolidated Byzantine empire during the first wave of Islamic conquests.⁴⁸ He had ascended the throne following the revolt against Emperor Phocas (r. 602–610), while the Persians were menacing the empire from the east. Al-Ṭabarī relates the story of Heraclius's accession to power and his subsequent triumph over the Persians in this way:

The *Rūm* killed Emperor Phocas because of what they saw of his immorality, his insolence toward God, and his bad administration. They replaced him with a man named Heraclius, who, seeing the extent of the destruction afflicted by the Persian soldiers and the number of prisoners and the booty they took, . . . cried and

implored God to save him and save his people from the Persian soldiers.⁴⁹

Al-Ṭabarī also describes the dreams that Heraclius had that predicted his future victory over the Persians. In his first dream Heraclius saw a great man sitting on an exalted seat. Another man entered the room and removed the first man from his seat, telling Heraclius: "I have delivered him to you." Heraclius did not tell anyone of his dream but later had a similar dream in which the second man threw a chain around the neck of the seated man and told Heraclius: "I have delivered to you Chosroes himself, so go and defeat him for victory is yours." After repeatedly dreaming these same dreams, Heraclius finally consulted with his patricians and advisors who urged him to march against the Persians. He did and was victorious.⁵⁰ Al-Mas'ūdī tells a similar story but emphasizes Heraclius's role in Phocas's deposition:

Heraclius . . . was from Salonica and came over to Constantinople by sea with provisions while they were besieged. His courage was apparent, and the people of Constantinople loved him. He withdrew with the patricians and the influential people . . . reminding them of Phocas's bad deeds as well as the victory of the Persians over them, because of his incompetence and his abject politics and his setting about for blood, and he asked them to kill him and they did.⁵¹

Al-Ṭabarī includes the following story, in which Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb tells of seeing Heraclius after his success over the Persians:

I went with a number of Quraysh merchants to Syria. . . . We arrived there [at the time] when Heraclius had just defeated the Persians and driven them out of his territory, recapturing from them his Great Cross, which the Persians had plundered. . . . Heraclius then came out from Ḥims, which was his headquarters, and walked on foot . . . in order to pray in the Holy City. Carpets were spread for him, and aromatic herbs were thrown on the carpets. Once he reached Ilyā, Heraclius prayed together with the nobles of the *Rūm*.⁵²

According to one modern scholar, the emperor's act of "splendid humility would have impressed itself in the minds of contemporary observers . . . and thus found its way into Muslim tradition."⁵³ This is particularly true in light of the early community's great emphasis on piety. But although this emphasis on the godliness of Heraclius is significant, perhaps more important still is his reputed familiarity with the Qur'ān. One source mentions that he wrote to Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (13–23/634–644), describing to him a tree and asking the caliph whether this tree had shaded the Virgin Mary. The tree that Heraclius was referring to is mentioned in a verse of *sūrat Maryam*: "And the birth pangs surprised her by the trunk of the palm tree."⁵⁴

Piety and knowledge of the Qur'ān were but a few of Heraclius's admirable qualities. For instance, al-Ṭabarī repeats the opinion of Heraclius ascribed to Abū Sufyān: "I have never seen someone whom I consider more shrewd than this uncircumcised man."⁵⁵ That Abū Sufyān, one of the most astute personalities of the pre-Islamic period, is chosen to utter these words testifies to the strong tradition upholding the wisdom of the Byzantine emperor. Indeed, this tradition is reiterated, much later on, by the eighth/fourteenth century historian and exegete, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), who praises Emperor Heraclius's political acumen in the highest terms: "Heraclius was one of the wisest men and among the most resolute, shrewd, deep, and strong-willed of kings. He ruled the Byzantines with great leadership and splendor."⁵⁶ Ibn Kathīr embroiders his description of Heraclius, in the context of the aforesaid Byzantine-Persian wars, by emphasizing the great popularity that Heraclius enjoyed among his people.⁵⁷

In general, Heraclius is placed by Arab authors on a pedestal that literally detaches him from his inequitable, even treacherous, following. His recognition of the shortcomings of Byzantine society is unmistakable, as in these words: "By God, I am living in a town where there is nothing good." Following the Byzantines' major defeat by the Muslim armies at Yarmūk, in 15/636, Heraclius is quoted as saying: "I knew that they were

going to defeat you because they [the Arab Muslims] love death as much as you love life." But earlier in the same text, when Heraclius is portrayed as incredulous at Byzantine defeats at the hands of the Muslims, he is made to ask his generals: "Are those people not human like you? Are you not more numerous?" Heraclius is subsequently described as emphasizing the Muslims' solidarity and the patience that only Islam could give them. He paints a picture of the Muslims as a people who awaken during the night and fast during the day. They keep their promises, encourage the good while prohibiting the forbidden, and treat one another with justice and equity.⁵⁸ The inner contextual implication is that the Byzantines have the opposite characteristics and are lacking in these virtuous qualities. Significantly, Heraclius himself consistently criticizes the defects of the Byzantines and sanctions the behavior and achievements of the emerging community in Arabia. The Muslim community is thus singled out by the Byzantine emperor as a distinct community with a unique vocation. In line with the Sunni doctrine that gradually developed and gained precedence in the Islamic world, this vocation confirms the view that the *umma*, the historic community, is based on the *shari'a* and that its historical development is divinely guided.⁵⁹

Heraclius, as presented by these sources, has all of the attributes of the ideal ruler. His almost perfect character, flawless use of authority, piety, sense of justice, wisdom, intelligence, magnanimity, and courage all proclaim him as an outstanding sovereign whose opinions and pronouncements approach infallibility. This characterization is essential to the task assigned to Heraclius in the Arabic-Islamic sources—namely, acknowledging the new faith preached by the Prophet Muḥammad. For, in these sources, Heraclius served one cardinal function: as the greatest ruler of the Near East during Muḥammad's lifetime, a man whose empire would survive Islam's onslaught to long remain its principal rival, he had responsibility for recognizing and acknowledging the prophetic character of the mission of Muḥammad and the excellence of his *umma*.

Heraclius is said to have learned about the emerging Islamic community in his own dreams. Al-Ṭabarī states that Heraclius was disturbed when he saw the kingdom of the "circumcised man" victorious in his dream. Not knowing about the new community of Islam, his patricians advised him, on learning of the dream, to send orders to behead every Jew in his dominion. However, a messenger from Buṣra brought a bedouin before him "who had been relating curious events that were happening in his country." The bedouin told Heraclius that "a man from our midst claims to be a prophet and some people have followed and believed him. Others did not, and battles occurred between them in many places." Heraclius ordered the bedouin to be stripped, and when he proved to be circumcised, Heraclius exclaimed: "This, by God, is the dream that I had." This passage reiterates an important attribute of Heraclius: his ability to foresee the future. In this instance, the prediction concerning the arrival of Muḥammad and the future spread of Islam occurred via the medium of a literal dream. Such dreams, as Leah Kinberg has shown, actually operated as a means of legitimization in various aspects of Islamic life. Heraclius's dream thus established the legitimacy of Muḥammad's mission, showing that the Prophet's appearance was anticipated as part of the divine plan.⁶⁰

It is possible that the Byzantine emperor came into direct contact with the new community, as it has been alleged that he was the recipient of a letter from Muḥammad. In his *Ṭabaqāt*, Ibn Sa'd mentions that the Prophet, having returned from Ḥudaybiyya in Dhū al-Ḥijja in year 6, sent messages to the kings (*al-mulūk*) inviting them to join the community of believers: "He, peace be upon him, sent Dihya b. Khalifa al-Kalbī . . . to Caesar with a message calling him to Islam."⁶¹

The authenticity of the letters written by the Prophet Muḥammad to the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius; to the Persian king, Chosroes II; to the Negus of Abyssinia; and to others has been the subject of great controversy. In the mid-1950s, Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh wrote in support of the authenticity of Muḥam-

mad's letter to Heraclius, and he has reiterated his position more recently. R. B. Serjeant considers all of the letters to be forgeries designed both to promote the notion that the Prophet conceived of Islam as a universal religion and to strengthen the Islamic position against Christian polemics. He thinks it improbable that the Prophet would send provocative letters to Caesar and to Chosroes at a time when he had still not mastered Arabia. Furthermore, Serjeant draws attention to anachronisms in the letter, such as mention of the payment of the tribute (*jizya*) required of Christians and Jews.⁶² However, it is undeniable that Arab historians and chroniclers did not doubt the authenticity of the letter to Heraclius since it is mentioned in the majority of the earlier and later sources. The differences among the various versions are ones of detail and concern the date on which the letter was sent and its exact phrasing; the formulations and the wording are almost identical. The letter to Heraclius, as transmitted by the Muslim historians, reads as follows:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. From Muḥammad, the servant of God and his messenger, to Heraclius, the great leader of the *Rūm*. Peace on those who follow the true guidance. Now then: I summon you to embrace Islam. Become a Muslim and you shall be safe; become a Muslim and God shall bestow on you a double recompense. But if you refuse, the sin of the *Arīṣīyyūn*⁶³ will fall on you. O people of the Book, come toward a Word that is common between us and you: that we worship only God and do not associate anything with Him and that no one among us takes as lords any others outside of God. If they turn away, then say: "Bear witness that we are those who submit to God."⁶⁴

The letter sent to Heraclius was very similar in its phrasing and content to letters that the Prophet supposedly sent to other contemporaneous rulers. A letter bidding the Persian king to embrace Islam or do battle⁶⁵ infuriated Chosroes II, who tore it apart and wrote to his governor in Yaman ordering him to march on Madina, fight Muḥammad, take him prisoner, and send him to the Persian capital.⁶⁶ Al-Ṭabarī contrasts the arro-

gance and total rejection of Islam by the Persian ruler, as well as his outright insult to the Prophet, with the deference shown by Heraclius, who is said to have read the letter respectfully and handled it with deference. This tradition is found in a variety of Muslim sources and is included in the great Shi'i Qur'ānic commentary of 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 328/939), who explains the verses of *sūrat al-Rūm* quoted earlier in light of Heraclius's reception of the Prophet's letter: the believers will rejoice at the Byzantine victory over the Persians, "because while the Byzantine ruler attached great importance to the Prophet's letter and honored his ambassador, the Persian emperor tore the letter apart and belittled the Prophet."⁶⁷

Heraclius is praised not only for his impeccable behavior in this episode but, more important, for actually acknowledging Muḥammad's prophethood. Indeed, the sources have Heraclius replying as follows:

To Aḥmad, the messenger of God, announced by Jesus, from Caesar, king of the *Rūm*. I have received your letter with your ambassador, and I testify that you are the messenger of God found in our New Testament. Jesus, son of Mary, announced you. I did ask the *Rūm* to believe in you, but they refused. Had they obeyed, it would have been better for them. I wish I were with you to serve you and wash your feet.⁶⁸

Thus, Heraclius not only responded, but he began his response with the name of the Prophet and by proclaiming him the messenger of God. Heraclius's reference to the New Testament belongs to that category of writings that attempted to establish that Muḥammad's advent was foretold in Christian and Jewish scriptures. Muḥammad's mission is hence rooted in the great monotheistic project and attested to by the greatest monotheistic ruler of the time—namely, the Byzantine emperor. Heraclius's stance, based on scriptural prediction, legitimizes Muḥammad's call, and his expressions of deep respect at the end of the letter leave no doubt as to his position. His letter was meant to be a public act that conferred legitimacy on Muḥammad and the

umma that he had created. A second confirmation found in the *Sīra* states that Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), one of the founders of Islamic tradition, was told by a Christian bishop that, when Heraclius received the letter of the Prophet, he sent it to a man in Rome who, after examining the epistle, authenticated that Muḥammad was the prophet they were expecting. "There is no doubt about it, so follow him and believe him."⁶⁹ Yet these passages posit not only a humbled Heraclius who expresses his recognition and utmost respect toward the new prophet but also a Heraclius who ultimately refuses to submit to the new faith.

Muḥammad is said to have been informed of Heraclius's positive reaction and to have explained his refusal to accept Islam in these words: "He recognized the truth, but the wicked and malicious one was stingy with his earthly kingdom and possessions and preferred this worldly life over his religion."⁷⁰ Heraclius himself admits it: "By God, I wish I could renounce this kingdom and go with you and be the servant of your *amīr*, but I am not inclined to leave my present situation in this kingdom. . . . By God, Christ has ordered us in the New Testament to believe in the *ummi* Prophet; however, prosperity and happiness lead to the prolongation of my self-deceit."⁷¹

This refusal warranted an explanation, and the one given in the Muslim sources is greed: the greatest Christian ruler recognized the truth but could not abandon his privileges. Another reason offered for the Byzantine leader's inability to embrace Islam is the utter rejection of such a proposition by the Byzantine patricians and dignitaries. The sources depict Heraclius as enjoining his generals to convert to Islam. Prudence leads him to address them from an upper chamber:

O *Rūm*, I have brought you together for a good purpose. This man [Muḥammad] has written me a letter summoning me to his religion. By God, he is truly the prophet whom we expect and find in our books, so let us follow him and believe in him, so that it may be well with us in this world and in the next.

The response of the generals was so negative and threatening that Heraclius reversed his position, claiming that he was only testing the firmness of their Christian faith. Nonetheless, he had made the effort to extend the Prophet's invitation to the Byzantine notables. Their furious rejection reportedly led Heraclius to tell the Prophet's ambassador, Dihya b. Khalifa al-Kalbī: "I know that your master is a prophet . . . but I go in fear of my life from the *Rūm*. Go to Bishop Dughāṭir and tell him, for he is greater among the *Rūm* than I." Dihya did go to see Dughāṭir, who certified Muḥammad's prophethood by stating: "I bear witness that there is no God but God and Aḥmad is his slave and apostle."⁷² With these words the patriarch of Constantinople not only bore witness to Muḥammad but went much further; he proclaimed his Islam by pronouncing the Islamic profession of faith and was promptly martyred at the hands of an outraged public, who beat him to death. Thus, according to Arab authors, the two most authoritative figures in the Byzantine empire—the political and the religious—understood and believed the message of Islam but were helpless in the face of the concerted opposition of the generals, the patricians, and the population at large. Heraclius refers explicitly to this opposition when one of his generals arrived to announce the Muslim victory over Byzantium's armies: "You were the most vehement concerning the letter that I received from the Prophet Muḥammad. I wanted to comply and join his religion, but you prevented me."⁷³

The sources were thus entirely unaware of the role of the Byzantine emperor as the vicar of Christ on earth, the instrument of God's will. The Islamic literary tradition proposes to its audience that a Christian emperor would react to the information about Islam by immediately recognizing its superiority to the faith that he was supposed to uphold and protect.⁷⁴ Notwithstanding this contradiction, the tradition that said that Heraclius had responded positively to the Prophet's letter was to have a lasting impact on the image of the Byzantines in Muslim history and legend. Three centuries later, the Fatimid caliph, al-

Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh (r. 341–365/953–975), reminded his audience of the episode, stating:

Did you not hear of the deed of the King of Persia when he received the letter of our grandfather, the Messenger of God, inviting him to Islam? He disdained it, displayed arrogance, and tore the letter apart. God then tore his kingdom apart and dispossessed him of it; and they [the Persians] were finished. Whereas, when the King of *al-Rūm* received the letter from the Prophet, he accepted and answered it, and no such misfortune befell him.⁷⁵

Thus, the survival and durability of the Byzantine empire was believed to be due to divine sanction because of the emperor's positive response to the Prophet's letter. This "theological" explanation is reinforced by the Prophet's immediate reaction to Heraclius's letter, as reported by al-Ya'qūbī: "Their kingdom remains as long as my letter remains with them."⁷⁶ Byzantium's survival would come to depend on its continued possession of the precious letter. This rationalization proposed by the texts is distinctly Islamic in the face of the disappearance of the Persian empire and the tenacious survival of Byzantium.

The most substantial and impressive acknowledgment by Heraclius of the prophethood of Muḥammad appears in the context of an interrogation found in al-Bukhārī's collection of traditions, the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, and in the chronicle of al-Ṭabarī.⁷⁷ The report concerns Abū Sufyān's meeting with Heraclius to discuss rumors about the emergence of a prophet in Arabia. The intrinsic unlikelihood of this scenario and the symbolic quality of the account betray its legendary character. Here, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* relate the story on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, who had heard it from Abū Sufyān:

Heraclius sent after him [Abū Sufyān] along with a group of Qurayshites who were merchants in al-Shām. They came to him while he was in Ilyā [Jerusalem], and he invited them to his council, where he was surrounded by the Byzantine leaders. . . . He said: "Who among you is the nearest kin to this man who claims to be a prophet?"

Abū Sufyān said: "I am. . . ."

The first question he asked about him was: "How is his lineage among you?" I said: "He is of the best lineage."

He said: "Has anyone among your people ever made such claims?" I said: "No."

He said: "Have any of his ancestors ever ruled?" I said: "No."

He said: "Is it the noble among the people or the weak who follow him?" I said: "The weak."

He said: "Are they increasing in number or decreasing?" I said: "Increasing."

He said: "Does anyone renounce this religion, discontented with it?" I said: "No."

He said: "Had you ever accused him of lying before he started saying what he says?" I said: "No."

He said: "Does he act treacherously?" I said: "No."

He said: "Have you fought him?" I said: "Yes. . . ."

He said: "What does he order you to do?" I said: "He says, worship God alone, do not associate anything with him, and leave behind what your ancestors say; and he orders us to pray and to be truthful and righteous."

Heraclius told his translator: "Tell him [this]. I asked you about his lineage, you said that it is among the best, and so are the prophets sent in the best lineage of their people. I asked, has anyone among you ever made such claims, and you said no; had anyone made such a claim previously, I would have said that he is a man who is sharing those claims. I asked whether any of his ancestors was sovereign, you said no; had any of his ancestors been sovereign, I would have said that he is a man reclaiming the inheritance of his ancestors. I asked you whether you used to accuse him of lying, before he started saying what he says, you said no; thus, I know that he did not sow untruth among people or lie to God. I asked you whether it was the exalted who followed him, or the weak, you said the weak; and those are the followers of prophets. I asked you whether they increase or decrease in number, and you said they increase; and so is faith until it is accomplished. I asked you whether anyone has recanted this religion, and you said no; and so is belief when its solace penetrates the heart. I asked you whether he is treacherous, and you said no; and so are prophets. I asked you what he orders you to do, and you mentioned that he

orders you to worship God and not associate anything with him and that he forbids you to worship idols and that he orders you to pray, be truthful, and righteous. Verily, if what you say is true, he will rule the ground beneath my feet. Although I knew that he was coming, I did not know that he was coming to you. Had I known, I would have taken it on myself to meet him, and had I been with him, I would have washed his feet."⁷⁸

The same passage is found quasi-textually in al-Ṭabarī, where it is also related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, who heard it from Abū Sufyān. The first section of al-Ṭabarī's version contains a few variations:

When we came to him, he asked if we were of the clan of this man [Muḥammad] and who was the nearest kin to him. I said that I was, and by God, I have never seen a man whom I consider shrewder than this uncircumcised man, meaning Heraclius. He told me to approach and sat me in front of him with my companions behind me. Then he said, "I will interrogate him, and, if he lies, confute him. . . ." He said, "Tell me about this man who has appeared among you making claims." I began to belittle him and to speak disparagingly of the affair and to say "Let him cause you no anxiety; his importance is less than you have heard," but he took no heed.⁷⁹

The two passages quoted above are shaped in identical ways and follow the same narrative structure. Heraclius asks a series of precise questions, receives direct answers, and then sums up the interrogation offering his own remarks and conclusions.⁸⁰ Significantly, his witness is Abū Sufyān, who was then still an enemy of the Prophet as well as one of the most prominent figures among the Quraysh. Muḥammad's most hostile opponent is thus made to enumerate, in front of Heraclius, the qualities of the new prophet, presenting to the Byzantine emperor the portrait of a perfect man. Abū Sufyān was so disturbed by Heraclius's conclusion that he stated: "This was the first time I ever became frightened by Muḥammad. I said to myself: this man [Heraclius], in his might, his kingship, and his fortresses, has sweat pearly on his brow due to his distress at [the

Prophet's] letter. I continued to be terrified of Muḥammad until the day I became Muslim."⁸¹

The two passages offer the same message: Muḥammad has all of the qualities of prophethood, and emperor Heraclius himself reaches this conclusion after close questioning. In al-Ṭabarī's version, Heraclius takes no heed of Abū Sufyān's attempts to belittle Muḥammad. He inquires about the Prophet's lineage and character to authenticate his authority and establish his legitimacy.⁸² Abū Sufyān's answers bring out, albeit unwillingly, Muḥammad's perfect character, his noble descent, and his prophetic qualities. Heraclius sums up his findings and proclaims Muḥammad to be the prophet they have all been awaiting. Moreover, the accumulated evidence of his thorough interrogation leads him not only to testify to the veracity of Muḥammad's mission but, more provocatively, to proclaim his own faith in the Prophet.

Equally important is the fact that Heraclius inquires not only about the personal attributes and characteristics of the emerging leader but also about the make-up of his following and the nature and strength of the Arabian movement. The information thus gathered allows Heraclius to foresee the future Islamic conquests. His statement, in which he predicts that Muḥammad "will rule the ground beneath my feet," suggests that Heraclius appreciated the actual and potential strength of the emerging force in Arabia. It further serves to establish the legitimacy of the *umma*, whose main conquests were first directed against Byzantine territory. For the ideal human community—"the *umma Muḥammadiyya*, the group of disciples initially small, weak, and threatened"⁸³—will defeat the Byzantine armies still under the supreme command of Heraclius and establish the Muslim state as Byzantium's successor state in the Near East. This characterization of the early Muslim community gains more significance when compared with statements such as the following, found in al-Ṭabarī. Al-Ṭabarī relates that when Heraclius was preparing to leave *bilād al-shām* to return to Constantinople, he gathered the *Rūm* together and told them: "This

man is the prophet that we find in our books. . . . Let us follow him, and we will be safe in this world and in the next.' They exclaimed: 'We? To be under the power of the Arabs, when we have the greatest empire and the best and most populous land!'"⁸⁴ Nonetheless, these same inhabitants of the most powerful empire would be defeated by the "weak" followers of Muḥammad.

Heraclius is also said to have interacted with the first caliph, Muḥammad's successor, Abū Bakr. A number of texts mention a delegation sent to the emperor by Caliph Abū Bakr to invite him to convert to Islam. The traditionist al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) includes the passage, as related by Hishām b. al-ʿĀṣ, in his *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*. The Muslim envoys are said to have stood in front of Heraclius without greeting him. Heraclius smiled and asked them what was preventing them from saluting him in the manner in which they hailed their kings. Hishām b. al-ʿĀṣ answered that it was impermissible to offer their salutation, "Peace be with you," to a Byzantine emperor. Heraclius then asked him what were the most significant words among the Muslims. The envoy responded, "There is no God but God, and God is great." As soon as these words were uttered, the lintel shuddered, causing Heraclius to inquire as to whether this was a common occurrence at the sound of these words. Hishām said, "This is the only time we have ever seen it." To which Heraclius responded, "I wish you had said that the room shudders every time you utter these words . . . because it would be simpler if it were not a matter of prophecy but rather a matter of trickery."⁸⁵ In this account, Heraclius is made to see for himself the strength of the new religion and the extent to which it receives divine favor. This is yet another link in the chain of narratives that repeatedly posits Heraclius in the role of the august adversary who acknowledges the truthfulness of the faith.

One night, Heraclius summoned the same envoys and brought in a box that contained a series of compartments. From each of these compartments, he retrieved, in turn, pieces of silk on which were drawn images representing Adam, Noah, and

Abraham. Heraclius then "opened a panel from which he pulled out a white image, which, by God, was of the Messenger of God. He asked: 'Do you know him?' We said, 'Yes, it is Muḥammad, the Messenger of God,' and we started to weep." Heraclius then confessed that this image actually was in the last of the compartments but that he had hastened to show it to them for verification. The location of this image in the last cubicle positioned Muḥammad as the last of the prophets, corroborating the Muslim belief that the prophet of Islam is the culmination of the world's sacred history. While the main actor is Heraclius, the real hero is ultimately the Prophet Muḥammad. The passage is conceived in a way that focuses attention on the hidden about to be revealed. The box conceals the meaning of the future, a meaning that includes the role that Muḥammad has always been intended to play. Thus, tangible ancient fabrics that contain a series of images that culminate in an image of Muḥammad legitimize a future by presenting that future as inevitable. Heraclius's collection of images once again confirms that Muḥammad belongs to the predestined Judaeo-Christian line of monotheist prophets. In fact, he is the seal of the prophets, and the Byzantine emperor literally holds the material proof of it.⁸⁶

The Islāmic tradition thus presents Heraclius in a dual role: he is both the recognizer of Islam and a near convert to it. The sources construct a web of anecdotes in which Heraclius is made to predict the appearance of the Prophet and then to avow his belief in his message. These accounts are categorized as *nubuwwa*, or as Islamic textual constructions that address Muḥammad's status as prophet or apostle, the nature of his apostolic mission, and his membership in the long chain of apostles sent by God to various communities.⁸⁷ In his double role as the most important political leader in the Near East and the temporal leader of Christianity, Heraclius's testimony is seen as being of immense value in confirming the prophethood of Muḥammad and in conferring on the Muslim community a distinction that sets it apart from its competitors. Heraclius's presentation of Muḥammad and his early followers belongs to the well-

entrenched Islamic tradition that upheld the early *umma* as the ideal and most perfect community.

The laudatory tradition that we find in Muslim medieval texts concerning Heraclius never falters. This consistency is unique in view of the fact that the Muslim texts present other Byzantine emperors both before and after Heraclius in a spectrum of negative light—a tendency that reaches a climax with the portrayal of Nicephorus Phocas in the fourth/tenth century. But not surprisingly, this later development never affects the image of Heraclius. Working as they were within a well-established literary and religious tradition—and, in this connection, it is important to recall that a number of highly significant passages on Heraclius appear in the most authoritative collection of *ḥadīth* and in the *sīra*—the later texts were bound to reiterate the initial positive appraisal of the Byzantine emperor. Undoubtedly, this tradition was considered particularly worthy of preservation due to the affirmative testimony of Heraclius with regard to Muḥammad and his *umma*. Safeguarding Heraclius's prediction and witness, vindicating their own prophet, and legitimizing the early *umma* would all become important elements of the Islamic texts. This factor helps to explain the uniquely positive image that Heraclius maintains in the Islamic sources. Indeed, while the material adds little to our historical knowledge of Emperor Heraclius, it certainly comprises part of the Islamic kerygma, with the purpose of promoting the claim of Islam to be the true religion through arguments retrojected into the historical past.

BYZANTINE CRAFTSMANSHIP:

A WINDOW TO GREATNESS

The first encounter between Islam and Byzantium was colored by positive perceptions of Byzantium's monotheism and of its upright ruler, Heraclius. Yet the empire's influence was most strongly felt as a model state, particularly in the early Islamic period, when the Muslims had no compunction about imitating the forms and practices of their imperial rival in developing

what would ultimately become a distinctive Islamic civilization. Byzantine influence in the realm of administrative and economic life was reflected in the retention of the Byzantine civil service and the reliance on Byzantine administrative, legal, and numismatic traditions—and even in language, as Greek continued to be used in state registers. Byzantine standards of weight and measures also survived. Thus the administrative patterns and the political framework that were chosen by the Umayyads were Byzantine in origin. The Arab Muslims also borrowed Byzantine architectural techniques and used Byzantine artisans to construct, decorate, and finish the buildings that they erected. There is no reason to doubt that the caliphate would have increased in complexity even in the absence of a model. However, such a model did exist, and the profound influence of the Byzantine *basileia* on the Islamic caliphate is evident in such phenomena as self-glorification through architecture, coinage, and ceremonial adaptations.

With the later Umayyads began the process of ascertaining and consolidating a unique Arab identity. Although the substructure of the Islamic state would long remain Byzantine, a distinctive structure for state administration was slowly constructed. The process was given momentum by Arabization reforms initiated during the rule of the Umayyad caliph, 'Abd al-Malik (r. 65–86/685–705). These reforms were in response to threats made by the Byzantines, the suppliers of gold coins to the Arabs, to stamp the currency with an inscription insulting to the Prophet Muḥammad. The caliph reacted by ordering the minting of his own Arabic coins. This tradition attests to the crucial motive behind the project of Arabization—namely, its symbolic significance—stemming from the religio-ideological struggle with a rival empire. At the same time, this entire period witnessed diplomatic relations between the two states. Andrea Kaplony has counted twenty-nine historical embassies between Byzantium and the Muslim state in the period extending from A.D. 639 to 750.⁸⁸

The establishment of the Muslim conquerors in the Near East

brought them face to face with monuments glorifying the Byzantine empire. The impact that these impressive vestiges of Byzantine culture made on the Arabs is evident in the sources which betray a persistent admiration for Byzantine artistry and craftsmanship. Pre-Islamic Arab poetry had already alluded to the greatness of Byzantine architecture, and flattering references to Byzantine bridges and palaces may be found in verses of the *Ode of Ṭarafa*.⁸⁹ Even the Persians are described in the records as revering the skills of Byzantine craftsmen and engineers and using them to erect buildings and construct cities. One of the early historical sources, *al-Akhhbār al-ṭiwāl* of al-Dīnawarī, mentions that when the Persian queen, Khumānī, invaded *bilād al-Rūm*, she captured Byzantine masons and ordered them to build three *iwān* in Iṣṭakhr and its surroundings.⁹⁰ Later, the Persian king is recorded as conquering Antioch, "the greatest city in al-Shām and al-Jazīra." He took the city's population captive and arranged for their transfer to Iraq, ordering that a city be built to receive them, a city that would be an exact copy of Antioch with respect to streets, houses, and monuments. Accordingly, a city called al-Rūmiyya was built next to al-Madā'in. When the Byzantine captives were released there, each went to the house that resembled his own home in Antioch. In another anecdote, Shapur II is said to have captured the heir to the Byzantine throne. As one condition for his release, Shapur ordered him to build a *qanṭara* on the Tustar river; the money and the labor necessary for the construction were sent by the Byzantine emperor.⁹¹ Al-Mas'ūdī also states that Shapur II invaded *bilād al-Rūm* and transferred some of its inhabitants to Sūs, Tustar, and other places in al-Ahwāz. Subsequently, brocade started being manufactured there, along with other kinds of silk.⁹² These examples of Persian acknowledgment of the superiority of Byzantine skills are given by the Arab authors as if to provide historical justification to their own praise for the excellence of Byzantine craftsmanship and architecture.

Arab respect for these Byzantine skills was manifested in a very tangible way by the Umayyads. In the words of H. A. R.

Gibb, "the most striking legacy of the imperial heritage . . . is furnished by the Umayyad policy of erecting imperial religious monuments."⁹³ Umayyad caliphs are said to have requested Byzantine help in the decoration of mosques in Madina and Damascus. One tradition is contained in the chronicle of al-Ṭabarī:

We began to pull down the mosque of the Prophet in Ṣafar 88 [January 707]. Al-Walid had sent word to inform the Byzantine emperor that he had ordered the demolition of the mosque of the Prophet and that he should aid him in this effort. The latter sent him 100,000 *mithqāl* of gold, together with 100 workmen and 40 loads of mosaic cubes. He [also] gave orders to search for mosaic cubes in ruined cities and then sent them to al-Walid.⁹⁴

Special reference to the Umayyad mosque in Damascus is found in the work of the geographer, al-Muqaddasī. He says that the Umayyad caliph al-Walid (r. 86–96/705–715) gathered together for its construction skilled artisans from Persia, India, the Maghrib, and Byzantium and expended on it seven years' worth of revenues earned from the Syrian land tax and eighteen shiploads of gold and silver brought from Cyprus, not counting the implements and mosaics sent as gifts by the emperor of Byzantium. To achieve his goal, Caliph al-Walid is supposed to have been in such need of Byzantine assistance that he blackmailed the emperor by threatening to destroy churches in the Muslim lands if his request was not met.⁹⁵

The Byzantines and the Muslims interpreted such assistance in contradictory ways. To the Byzantines, it was an imperial favor, granting the "barbarians" the privileged use of highly technical training that, by its very quality, served to enhance the prestige of the Byzantine emperor and bring the "barbarians" into the imperial fold. To the Muslims, this response to their call for artists and artisans symbolized the Byzantine emperor's subservience to them, even though the caliph's request may have derived solely from his personal conviction that first-rate work could only come from Byzantium.⁹⁶ Al-Muqaddasī explains why the splendor of the mosque—and thus the quality of the crafts-

manship—was so important. He says that he asked his uncle “why al-Walid had been so extravagant in spending the money of the Muslims on such buildings when it could have been better employed in rebuilding fortresses [and] repairing roads.” His uncle replied:

Do not think like that, my son. Al-Walid was divinely guided in a matter of great importance. He looked out over Syria, the land of the Christians, and saw there fine churches, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and those of Lydda and Edessa, enticing in their ornamentation and great fame. So he erected for the Muslims a mosque that would divert their attention from these churches, and he made it one of the wonders of the earth. Do you not understand that when ‘Abd al-Malik saw the imposing and inspiring dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, he was afraid lest it assume an equally large place in the heart of Muslims? So he built on the rock a dome, which is now seen there.⁹⁷

By patronizing the construction of superb monuments, al-Walid was taking yet another step to confirm that he, the Caliph of Islam, possessed all of the characteristics of an exalted ruler. The importance of ceremonial architecture was becoming more apparent to Muslim rulers as they attempted to vie on all levels with Byzantium and its emperors. Mosques were the first elements in a system of visual symbols representing Muslim imperial organization. Indeed, Byzantine influence did not lie solely in the decision to construct or in the techniques employed by architects and artisans; it was also present in the conceptualization of monumental architecture as a vehicle for the glorification of the Umayyad dynasty, the Islamic empire, and the new religion. Even during the reign of Caliph ‘Umar II (r. 99–101/717–720), when many of the lavish rituals that had come to be associated with the Umayyad caliphate were abandoned, the significance of monuments such as mosques did not go unnoticed. The later Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176) states that ‘Umar II considered removing the mosaics, marble tiles, and metal decorations of the Damascus mosque as part of his campaign to encourage a more austere

lifestyle. However, the caliph changed his mind due to the opposition of a committee representing the people of Damascus as well as chance remarks made by a visiting Byzantine delegation. Members of the delegation reportedly expressed surprise at the grandeur and luxury of the mosque, with their leader saying: "We have always belittled the Arabs and spoken of their empire as temporary. But whoever built this mosque is definitely the great king of a long-lasting nation."⁹⁸ This incident is said to have convinced 'Umar II that the mosque's lavish appearance was an ideological weapon that could be used against the enemies of Islam. But to this day, the buildings constructed by 'Abd al-Malik and al-Walid in Jerusalem, Damascus, and Madina remain central sanctuaries that also testify to the skill of Byzantine artisans.

In addition to the indispensable assistance they provided for the decoration of the earliest Umayyad mosques, the Byzantines are mentioned, three centuries later, offering the same expertise to the Umayyad ruler of Spain. In the fourth/tenth century, the Umayyad caliph of Spain, al-Hakam II, sent to Emperor Nicephorus Phocas a deputation entrusted with the mission of obtaining the services of a specialist in mosaics to supervise the decoration of newly constructed areas in the mosque of Cordova.⁹⁹ Thus, Arab rulers continued to be fascinated by the craftsmanship and artistry of Byzantine masters for more than three centuries after the Arab conquest. Indeed, the Arab sources agree that the Byzantines excelled at certain skills, leaving their nearest competitors far behind.

The Byzantines are the nation most skilled in painting. . . . Their artists paint human beings without omitting a single detail, for the Byzantine painter is not satisfied with the painting until he has transformed the figure into a youth, a mature man, or a dotard; he next makes his subject handsome and charming and then mirthful or lachrymose. In his painting, the artist even manages to distinguish between a sarcastic smile and a shy one and between gaiety and the laughter of the delirious.¹⁰⁰

Similarly, al-Marwazī (d. after 514/1120) states that "the *Rūm* are indisputable masters in *al-ṣanā'i' al-mihaniyya* (the applied arts)," although he does go on to qualify his praise by noting that they are nonetheless inferior to the Chinese. But the consensus among Arab authors is that the Byzantines are skilled artisans in all fields, regardless of the actual medium: they mention painting and sculpture, carpentry and weaving—particularly the weaving of silk brocades (*bazyūn*). The high value placed on Byzantine brocades is attested to in an anecdote that appears in al-Tha'ālibī's *Laṭā'if al-ma'ārif* in which Abū Dulā al-Khazrajī prays for certain godsend, including the brocades of the *Rūm*.¹⁰¹ Ibn al-Farrā' stresses that the Byzantines have relinquished warfare to become a settled people, landowners who raise sheep, cows, and horses. But above all, they are craftsmen. Judge 'Abd al-Jabbār agrees, writing that the common people of the Byzantine empire are artisans and tradesmen.¹⁰²

It is evident that the Arabs genuinely appreciated Byzantine skills in architecture, crafts, and the fine arts. Indeed, it has long been recognized that, during the Umayyad and early Abbasid era, Byzantium exerted considerable direct and indirect influence on Islamic art. Despite differences in religion and the antagonism born of military and political rivalry, the sources are unanimous in idealizing the Byzantines as talented artists and master craftsmen. Al-Jāhiz is unequivocal: "In the domains of construction, carpentry, craftsmanship, and turnery, the Byzantines have no equal."¹⁰³

CONSTANTINOPLE: SIEGES AND ESCHATOLOGY

The idealization of the Byzantines as artists and master craftsmen is further apparent in the sources' treatment of the Byzantine capital. The Muslims had no doubt that the Byzantines' highest material achievement was the great city of Constantinople. Constantinople occupied a unique place in the Byzantine empire, for its foundation symbolized the beginning of the eastern Roman Christian empire. Although the specific character of

this empire took centuries to develop, this process was set into motion by the creation of the new capital at Byzantium and Constantine the Great's radical change in religious policy.

Constantinople was the empire's political and administrative center, the focus of its religious and economic life, and the source of literature and the arts. This Orthodox Christian city represented continuity as it was the acknowledged heir to the pagan Greco-Roman civilization of antiquity and a center of exceptional political, economic, and cultural importance throughout the Middle Ages. In Byzantine sources, the patterns of topoi lauding Constantinople included the city's close connection to imperial power, its parity with Rome, its favorable geographical situation, its propitious climate, its sumptuous architecture, and its role as the center of arts and letters. At various times, the Byzantines designated their capital as the New Jerusalem, the New Rome, the City of the Virgin, and the Queen of Cities.¹⁰⁴ Although the Arab authors called the city al-Qusṭāntīniyya, they were nevertheless aware of the site's old name, Byzantium. Al-Mas'ūdī also discusses a third name, Istanbul: "The *Rūm* call it 'bolin,' and when they wish to express its greatness as the capital of the empire, they say 'estin bolin.' The *Rūm* do not call it al-Qusṭāntīniyya; only the Arabs do so."¹⁰⁵

The Arab authors were aware of the prestige that Constantinople conferred on the Byzantines—not least in their own eyes. The geographer Ibn Khurradadbeh calls Constantinople "the greatest city of the *Rūm* and their refuge."¹⁰⁶ A tale is told of 'Ubāda b. al-Ṣāmit, the ambassador of Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–654), who was denied entrance to the city so long as he rode on a camel and was asked to enter it on a mule. 'Ubāda refused the request and ultimately rode in on his camel, wearing his turban and carrying his sword.¹⁰⁷ Such an entry was obviously an exceptional case requiring the special permission of the emperor himself. The Arabic text thus implies that a foreigner, even an ambassador, was not usually allowed to enter "the City of the King" except on a mule. The episode represents an elaborate exchange in which the relative ranks of

the various parties were ascertained. 'Ubāda's success in entering the city in the manner that he chose was an assertion of a superiority that was acknowledged through protocol.

For the Arabs, the significance of Constantinople lay as much in its political and cultural prestige as in its material magnificence. This was especially true in the early days of Muslim expansion and during the consolidation of the Muslim state. The ambition of the first-century caliphs seems to have been nothing less than the establishment of their power in Constantinople, for the city was the natural focus of their growing empire and thus the target of several military campaigns. But with the solidification of the structure of the Islamic empire, Umayyad policy began to disengage itself from Byzantine tradition. Furthermore, the failure of repeated attempts to conquer Constantinople together with the transfer of the Muslim capital to Iraq—moving the empire's center away from the Byzantine frontier—had the effect of distancing the dream of the city's conquest, rather than strengthening Muslim resolve to make it a reality by employing forces and efforts in a continuous and organized fashion.

The Arab authors analyze extensively the various Muslim sieges of Constantinople. Their causes are discussed, their expeditions and operations are detailed, and various anecdotes connected to them are related. Indeed, these events are celebrated both in history and in legend and have even found their way into eschatological literature. The expedition of Yazīd and Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī against Constantinople in the year 48–49/668–669 resonates in the Arabic sources. *Kitāb al-aghānī* mentions two tents, one sheltering the daughter of the King of Rūm and the other harboring the daughter of Jabala b. al-Ayham, the Ghassanid emir, with each separately encouraging and acclaiming the exploits of her champions. This Ghassanid family of Jafna had fought with the Byzantines at the decisive battle of Yarmūk, in A.D. 636, where the defeat of the Byzantines placed the whole of Syria and Palestine at the mercy of the Muslims. It is thus significant that the Arab Christian tribe allied to the Byzantines is perceived as being on the side of the Muslims:

tribal and ethnic affiliation are seen as superseding religious allegiance. Elsewhere in the same tale, Yazīd, desirous of pleasing the daughter of Jabala, reportedly struck the gate of Constantinople with his club until the gate was cleft in two.¹⁰⁸ An important legend also developed around the personality of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, one of the Companions of the Prophet. Abū Ayyūb died during the expedition and was buried under the walls of Constantinople.¹⁰⁹ The Byzantine emperor is said to have threatened to have his tomb desecrated as soon as the Arab armies left. However, threats by the caliph regarding the safety of Christians living in Arab lands forced the emperor to promise to respect Abū Ayyūb's tomb. Later, the Byzantine emperor adorned it by adding a monument with a cupola, and many authors say that Abū Ayyūb's tomb became the object of veneration and pious visits by the Byzantines, who prayed there for rain in times of drought.¹¹⁰ In this tale, the Byzantine emperor is presented as appreciating the religious aura of Abū Ayyūb, a Companion of the Prophet who fought at Badr and was with Caliph 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalib in the battle of Ṣiffīn in 37/657.

The most famous expedition against Byzantium was undertaken by Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik in 97-99/715-717, and numerous accounts of it have been preserved. The sources are late and contradictory, and the oldest accounts are already more legend than history. The account in *Kitāb al-uyūn*, which dates from the latter half of the fifth/eleventh century, is the most complete.¹¹¹ Here, Maslama is said to have written a letter to the Byzantine emperor stating: "I will not leave this *jazīra* [peninsula] without entering your city." The emperor agreed to open the gates to Maslama alone and ordered that "horses and men be lined up from the gate of the city to the gate of the Great Church, banners be erected, and palaces be decorated with the best possible ornamentation." Maslama told the famous Syrian *ghāzī*, 'Abdallāh al-Baṭṭāl: "I enter this city knowing that it is the capital of Christianity and its glory; my only purpose in entering it is to uphold Islam and humiliate unbelief." Maslama paraded in the city and was greeted at the gate of the palace by

Emperor Leo III (r. A.D. 717–741); the emperor stood up, kissed his hand, and walked alongside him to the church, with Maslama still on his horse.¹¹² A mosque in Constantinople is attached to Maslama's name, for Emperor Constantine VII (r. A.D. 913–959) mentions that the mosque of the Saracens was built at the request of Maslama in the Praetorium.¹¹³ The construction of a mosque in Constantinople was a subject of major concern among the Muslims. One tradition has the early generation of Muslim leaders debating over where Constantinople's future mosque will be built:

Abū Firās, the *mawla* of 'Amrū b. al-'Āṣ, Mūsā b. Nuṣayr, and Ayyād b. 'Aqāba met and talked about the conquest of Constantinople and the mosque that will be built in it. Abū Firās said: "I know the location where it will be built." Mūsā b. Nuṣayr said: "I, too, know the location." 'Ayyād b. 'Aqāba responded: "Let each one of you whisper it in my ear." They told him and he said: "You are both right."¹¹⁴

Thus, in spite of its failure, the siege of Constantinople in 99/717 had one positive outcome for the Arabs: namely, the establishment of the first mosque in the Byzantine capital. Under the Abbasids, only one expedition, commanded by Hārūn, son of al-Mahdī, in the latter part of the second/eighth century, reached the Bosphorus. This latter effort against Constantinople was to play an important part in later Turkish folklore.

The role that Constantinople assumed in Muslim religious literature was connected to these military expeditions aimed at the conquest of the Byzantine capital. Essentially, this material is anachronistic, since it was developed only after the repeated failures of the Arab armies. In it, the conquest of Constantinople came to represent a supreme, albeit unattainable, goal. Traditions are divided between those that predict the future conquest of Constantinople and others that defer it to the end of time. The most authoritative corpus of traditions, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, alludes to Constantinople's fall, for it quotes the Prophet as saying: "The first among my people who will conquer the city of the

Caesar will have their sins forgiven." The city's conquest was also seen as a means by which a ruler or even a whole dynasty might obtain the highest form of legitimization. *Kitāb al-'uyūn* mentions that a group of learned men informed the Umayyad caliph, Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Malik (r. 96-99/715-717), of a *ḥadīth* stating that a caliph bearing the name of a prophet mentioned in the Qur'ān would be the conqueror of Constantinople. As a consequence, Caliph Sulaymān/Salomon dispatched his brother, Maslama, to capture the city.¹¹⁵ The third Orthodox caliph, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (23-35/644-656), conveyed this promise to the Arabs in charge of the conquest of al-Andalus: "Constantinople will be conquered from al-Andalus; if you conquer al-Andalus, you will be the partners of whomsoever conquers Constantinople."¹¹⁶ The conquest of Constantinople was the ultimate goal for the conquerors and the principal justification for all of their efforts. In one tradition found in *Kitāb al-fitan* by Nu'aym b. Ḥammād (d. ca. 228/844), the Byzantines themselves are portrayed as being familiar with such beliefs concerning the fall of their capital:

We were with Sufyān b. 'Awf al-Ghāmīdī when we reached the gate of Constantinople, the Golden Gate. . . . They [the Byzantines] were alarmed. . . and said: "What do you seek, O Arabs!" We said: "We have come to this town, whose inhabitants are unjust, to have God destroy it by our hands." They said: "By God, we do not know whether the book has lied or whether we have been mistaken in our calculations. . . . By God, we know that it is to be conquered one day, but we do not see that the time is now."¹¹⁷

The best documentation that we have of the Muslim community's general reaction to the failed sieges of Constantinople is contained in the apocalyptic literature. These are prophetic pronouncements that are attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad or to any one of his companions and that describe the signs and portents of the last hour and the tribulations that will precede it. Accounts of the apocalypse were widespread in the early com-

munity of believers. In fact, speculation about the end of the world was rife among all religious communities in the Near East at that time. Apocalypticism "could fit contemporary and social events into a transcendent scheme of meaning," helping to account for the success of the Muslims.¹¹⁸ Yet at certain key times, the Muslims' fears and hopes were also voiced in a cacophony of apocalyptic sentiment. Hence, their battles with the Byzantines were identified with the *malāḥim*, the final wars at the end of the world ending with the Muslim capture of Constantinople. The remnants of this material are scattered in collections of *ḥadīth* and in a few *fitan* or *malāḥim* texts. The apocalyptic mood was the prevailing manner in which early Muslims interpreted their present—that is, "in terms of an onrushing future."¹¹⁹ Some of these accounts attempted to articulate the theological and political relationship between the Muslim and Byzantine communities. Many of them focused on the Byzantine capital. While it is difficult to generalize about communal attitudes on the basis of apocalyptic material, in the case of Constantinople, the traditions are so numerous and so varied that they cannot represent the expression of individual voices alone.

A number of traditions created a relatively comprehensive apocalyptic explanation for the failure to take Constantinople. The periodic emergence of apocalyptic texts and their accumulation usually indicates periods of tribulation, military defeat, or social and economic pressure. In an article on medieval apocalypses, P. J. Alexander calls such texts "chronicles written in the future tense." In addition to displaying a divinely predetermined view of history, apocalyptic texts reflect pessimism about the present and are designed to give people in difficult circumstances energy and encouragement. Thus, apocalyptic prophecies not only reflect a particular view of the nature and purpose of history; they are also a form of political rhetoric and a way to give meaning to the world. This explanation constitutes, in Bernard McGinn's words, an example of the a posteriori functions of apocalypticism, "the expansion of the apocalyptic scenario to in-

clude transcendentalized versions of recent events."¹²⁰ Once it became clear to the Arabs that the subjugation of Constantinople was not going to take place in the foreseeable future, predictions of a future conquest waned and were replaced by apocalyptic expectation. Do these traditions indeed reflect the Muslim reaction to the repeated failures of the Muslim armies to conquer the city? One *ḥadīth* adopts a very consoling tone: "If the world has only one day to live, God will prolong it to allow a person from my family to bring under subjugation the mountains al-Daylam [in the Caspian region] and Constantinople."¹²¹

Numerous traditions going back to the Prophet Muḥammad himself made the conquest of the Byzantine capital one of the six portents of the Hour, *ashrāt al-sā'a*, signaling the approaching end of the world. Before the advent of the sixth portent, the Muslims would drive the Byzantines before them as far as Constantinople and, on hearing that the *dajjāl* had appeared, conquer the city.¹²² Such eschatological predictions, being part of Muslim apocalyptic literature, are difficult to separate from responses to actual political circumstances within the Muslim community. The actual date of these traditions is very uncertain and probably does not go back further than the period of 'Abd al-Malik and his immediate successors.¹²³

One tradition linking the conquest of Constantinople to the last hour states that the end of time will be preceded by six events, the last of which will be the conquest of Constantinople.¹²⁴ Another similar eschatological passage states that

The Messenger of God said: Count six [signs] before the hour. The first of them will be my death . . . the second will be the conquest of Jerusalem. . . the third will be like a fatal sheep disease among my community. . . the fourth will be internal strife [*fitna*] among my community . . . the fifth will be that wealth will abound among you to such an extent that were a man given a hundred dinars he would be displeased. . . the sixth will be a truce between you and the Byzantines, but they will then [break it,] march on you, and fight you.

According to Hoyland, this report was put forward during the second civil war, after the Arabs were forced to sue for peace from the Byzantine emperor in A.D. 685. He suggests that it expressed their anxiety and their fear of a Byzantine comeback.¹²⁵ According to another tradition, Ibn 'Amr is quoted as saying that

You will invade Constantinople three times. During the first attempt, you will face hardship. During the second, there will be a truce so that you will build a mosque in it . . . and in the third invasion, God will open it for you.¹²⁶

One cycle of eschatological material found in *Kitāb al-fitan* is constituted of a series of apocalypses that predict or promise the conquest of Constantinople through no military effort whatsoever on the part of the Muslim invaders. One *ḥadīth* mentions that the conquest of Constantinople will be preceded by a Byzantine attack against Dābiq, in northern Syria, and a battle with an army from Madina.¹²⁷ But of all the Muslim historical apocalypses, the most powerful, perhaps is the following:

There will be a truce and a peace between the Muslims and the Byzantines such as that they will fight together their enemy and will divide the spoils. Then the Byzantines will attack Persia together with the Muslims. . . . [Following disagreement over the division of spoils, the Byzantines] return to their ruler in Constantinople and say: the Arabs have betrayed us, and [since] we are more than they are in number and better prepared than they are, let us fight them. He will say: I dislike betraying them, since they have had the upper hand throughout the age. . . . [Follows a series of battles between the Byzantines and the Muslims until the latter reach Constantinople.] The Muslims surround the city of infidelity on Friday night. . . . When the sun comes up, the Muslims give a [single] shout of *Allāhu akbar* [God is great], and the walls between the two towers fall. Then the Byzantines say: before we were fighting only the Arabs, but now we are fighting our Lord, who has destroyed our city and laid it desolate for them. . . . Then the *dajjāl* will appear in truth, and God will conquer Constantinople by means of companies who are his friends.¹²⁸

This tradition has the Muslims descending on "the city of Heraclius" and conquering it with *takbīr*. The *takbīr*, a topos used by early traditionists in reporting the conquest of cities, is both a signal to attack and a slogan acknowledging divine support. In this account, a supernatural force is attributed to the *takbīr*; when uttered by Muslim warriors, the massive walls of the city crumble in response.¹²⁹ Another tradition states:

[Constantinople] will be conquered by men who cry out and beseech God, the All-High. Once they fall on it, they will fast for three days, call on God, and beseech him so that God will destroy its eastern side. The Muslims will then enter it and build mosques within it.¹³⁰

Constantinople was not the only city that would be conquered by the armies of the "believers." Another subject discussed in the apocalyptic literature is the sequence in which "the cities of unbelief" would be conquered:

Constantinople was mentioned. Some people said: "The conquest of Constantinople precedes that of Rome." Others said: "The conquest of Rome precedes that of Constantinople." 'Abdallāh b. 'Amrū asked for a box of his to be brought. The box contained a book. He said: 'We will conquer Constantinople before Rome.'¹³¹

'Amrū b. al-Āṣ is also the source for a tradition of the Prophet that involves asking the Prophet which of the two cities, Constantinople or Rome, would be conquered first. The Prophet said: "The city of Heraclius will be conquered first—that is, Constantinople." Another tradition, through Ka'b, states: "We conquer Amorium before Nicaea, and Nicaea before Constantinople, and Constantinople before Rome."¹³²

Predictions of the future capture of Constantinople continued well into the early fourth/tenth century. One example occurs within the context of the martyrdom of the great mystic, al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922). The flagellation to which al-Ḥallāj was condemned was interrupted by two strange sentences that he allegedly uttered. The first occurred at the four-hundredth blow: "At

this very moment, Constantinople is being captured." At the six-hundredth blow, al-Ḥallāj told the prefect: "I have a counsel that equals the capture of Constantinople." To which the prefect answered: "I was warned by the vizier that you would make the Euphrates flow with gold in order to interrupt the flagellation."¹³³ By this time, the desire to capture Constantinople had almost become a cliché, evoking the memory of the sieges and the now distant hope of actual conquest.

Initially, the Byzantine empire was widely expected to fall in the same manner as the Persian empire did. This is reflected in the following tradition, which must have circulated in the earliest period: "If Chosroes dies, no Chosroes will emerge after him; if Qayṣar dies, no *qayṣar* will emerge after him."¹³⁴ Later, after Muslim defeats and the failure of the repeated sieges of Constantinople, in particular, the Byzantines became the most challenging enemy of the Islamic state. This is also reflected in a tradition that contrasts the fates of the Persian and Byzantine empires by stating that the Byzantines must not be compared with the Persians, who fell unconscious after a few blows. The *Rūm*, by contrast, are described as a many-headed hydra: every time a head is cut off, another grows back. Thus, their demise will come only with the arrival of the day of judgment.¹³⁵

Thus, by the third/ninth century, *fath Qusṭanṭiniyya*, the capture of Constantinople, had become one of the signs of the last hour. By adopting an apocalyptic vision, the Muslims were giving way to realism and pragmatism, after they attempted to conquer the city several times and failed. But the adoption of pseudorevelations signifies more than the haphazard expression of simple intentions, hopes, and dreams.¹³⁶ At that point, Constantinople was the real challenge and the real prize. The capital of the Byzantines was not only a wealthy city and a center of trade; it was also the center of culture and of civilization. The period of Umayyad rule was the one that saw the greatest and most intense Byzantine influence on the nascent Islamic civilization. Once Byzantine influence started to recede, Constantinople could not be totally ignored, but its capture was postponed to a

remote future. Hence, the conquest of the Byzantine capital passed from the domain of politics and propaganda to that of legend and eschatology.

NOTES

1. According to A. P. Kazhdan and Giles Constable, "The Byzantines believed themselves to be Romans, considered themselves to be the direct descendants of antiquity and the heirs of the ancient language, law, and terminology." See *People and Power in Byzantium*, 120–121.
2. Hélène Ahrweiler, *L'Idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin* (Paris, 1975), 62.
3. Nikolai Serikoff, "Rūm and Yūnānī: Towards the Understanding of the Greek Language in the Medieval Muslim World," in *East and West in the Crusader States: Context, Contacts, Confrontations*, ed. Krijnie Ciggaar et al. (Leuven, 1996), 169–194.
4. Šā'id al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* (al-Najaf, 1967), 43–46.
5. Abū al-Hasan al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-jawhar*, ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut, 1966), 2:32. The Byzantines referred to themselves as Rhomanoi and the Arabs called them Rūm. The Kievans, however, always called them Greeks, thus defining them by language rather than political prestige. See S. Franklin, "The Empire of the Rhomanoi as Viewed from Kievan Russia: Aspects of the Byzantine-Russian Cultural Relations," *Byzantion* 53 (1983): 507–537. See also Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Qaṣd wa al-umam fī al-ta'rīf bi uṣūl ansāb al-'arab wa al-'ajam*, ed. I. Abyārī (Beirut, 1985), 43. For reference to Abū Hurayra, see Suliman Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), 71.
6. Roy Mottahedeh, "Some Islamic Views of the Pre-Islamic Past," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 1 (1994): 17–26.
7. Manuela Marin, "Dos textos andalusies sobre Bizancio," *Erytheia* 13 (1992): 45–51.
8. Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī, *Kitāb al-buldān*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden, 1885), 136; Abū al-Hasan al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa al-ishrāf*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden, 1967), 141.
9. Canard, "Les relations politiques."
10. Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān*, 149.

11. Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, ed. Tharwat 'Ukāsha (Cairo, 1960), 38.
12. Ignaz Goldziher has briefly analyzed the various colors the Arabs used to refer to other people. See his *Muslim Studies*, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (London, 1967), 2:243–245. Maribel Fierro has discussed Aṣfar as a name (*ism 'alam*) and a *laqab*. As for the *banū al-Aṣfar* explanation, she states that the one that seems most commonly accepted is that it refers to Esau or to one of his descendants. "Aṣfar," *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993): 169–181. The confusion over nomenclature was not restricted to the Muslim Arab authors: it was also shared by Arab Christian authors. See Khalil Samir, "Quelques notes sur les termes *rum* et *rumi* dans la tradition arabe," in *La nozione di romano tra cittadinanza e universalità* (Napoli, 1984), 461–478.
13. Patricia Crone argues that the rise of Islam may be largely explained in terms of the impact of Byzantium and Persia on Arabia. *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (New York, 1987), 250.
14. See, among others, Abū al-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl* (Beirut, n.d.), 3:467; Abū 'Abdallāh al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-qur'ān* (Cairo, 1967), 14:5; Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafi, *Tafsīr* (Beirut, n.d.), 3–4:366.
15. Theodor Noldeke and Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qurāns* (Leipzig, 1909), 149–151; Edmund Beck, "Die Sure ar-Rūm (30)," *Orientalia*, n.s., 13 (1944): 334–355; Manfred Götz, "Zum Historischen Hintergrund von Sure 30, 1–5," in *Festschrift Werner Caskel* (Leiden, 1968), 111–120; Rudi Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart, 1971).
16. Mujaḥid b. Jubayr al-Tābi'ī, *Tafsīr Mujaḥid*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Suwartī (Islamabad, 1975), 2:499. During his lifetime, Mujaḥid, a student of Ibn 'Abbās, was proclaimed as the authority in *tafsīr*.
17. Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr al-qur'ān*, AMs (microfilm), tafsīr 101, vol. 2, folio 50, Institut des manuscrits arabes, Cairo.
18. Abū Zakariyyā al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī al-qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Najjār (Cairo, n.d.), 2:319.
19. Mahmoud Ayyoub, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters* (New York, 1984), 1:3.

20. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford, 1988), 46–62.
21. Abū Sa'īd was an important traditionist who died in 74/693. See Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-wāfi bi al-wafayyāt*, ed. Bernd Radtke (Stuttgart, 1991), 15:148. The *amṣār* (sing. *miṣr*) are the early Islamic settlements developing out of the armed encampments established by Arabs in the conquered provinces.
22. *Ta'wīl* in the sense of *tafsīr*—that is, explanation. Early commentators, notably al-Ṭabarī, used the terms *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* interchangeably. In time, the terms came to designate two distinct branches of Qur'anic science. See Ayyoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, 1:20; and Rashid Ahmad, "Qur'anic Exegesis and Classical Tafsīr," *Islamic Quarterly* 12 (1968): 71–119.
23. In the sense of not having received revelation through a book. See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab* (Beirut, 1992), 12:34.
24. Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl al-qur'ān* (Cairo, 1954), 21:10–14.
25. Isaiah Goldfeld, "The *Tafsīr* of 'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās," *Der Islam* 58 (1981): 125–135. Ibn 'Abbās was called the interpreter of the Qur'ān (*tarjumān al-qur'ān*). See Mujahid al-Sawwaf, "Early Tafsīr: A Survey of Qur'anic Commentary up to 150 A.H.," in *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Mawlāna Sayyid Abū Alī Mawdūdī*, ed. Khurshīd Aḥmad and Zafar Ansārī (Jeddah, 1979), 135–145.
26. Such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), *Zād al-masīr fī 'ilm al-tafsīr* (Damascus, 1945/1365), 286–289; 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Khāzin (d. 1324/725), *Lubāb al-ta'wīl fī ma'ānī al-tanzīl* (Cairo, 1955), 201–202; and al-Ḥāfiẓ b. Kathīr (d. 774/1372), *Tafsīr al-qur'ān al-aẓīm* (Cairo, 1928/1347), 6:412–420.
27. 'Alī b. Aḥmad, Al-Wāḥidī al-Naysabūrī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl* (Cairo, 1968), 231–232.
28. Andrew Rippin, "Qur'ān 21:95, 'A Ban Is upon Any Town,'" *Journal of Semitic Studies* 24 (1979): 43–53.
29. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tanzīh al-qur'ān 'an al-maṭā'in* (Beirut, n.d.), 399.
30. Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:466–467; Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, (Cairo, 1329), 7:163; 'Abdallāh



Confronting Byzantium

As the second/eighth century progressed, the geographical frontiers of Arabic-Islamic civilization reached their farthest limits, and the Arabs gradually came to recognize that the expansion of the Muslim state and the Muslim faith had halted. By the third/ninth century, the practice of making two or three ritualistic expeditions a year against Byzantine territory had become so established that officials soon laid down a schedule for these operations. Qudāma b. Ja'far (d. between 320 and 337/932 and 948) gives the precise dates of departure, duration, and other details of summer expeditions (*ṣawā'if*) and winter expeditions (*shawātī*).¹ Under the late Umayyads and the early Abbasids, the boundary between the Arab and Byzantine empires was formed by natural barriers—the great ranges of the Taurus and anti-Taurus. Here, a line of fortresses, *al-thugūr*, stretched from Malāṭīyah, on the Upper Euphrates, to Ṭarsūs, near the Mediterranean coast, marking and guarding the frontier. This line of fortresses was divided into two groups: one in the northeast, *thughūr al-Jazīra*, and another in the southwest, *thughūr al-Shām*. During the first year of the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd, 170/786, Hārūn created a new frontier district called *al-'awāṣim*, constituting a second defensive line. This marked the

classical system of frontier organization.² Almost yearly, the Arabs made incursions into Asia Minor; however, most of these activities were confined to holding the line of the Taurus. Occasionally, they occupied towns in Anatolia, but such measures were temporary, and they made no permanent conquests. Warfare between Byzantium and the Muslim world at this time consisted largely of raids that were periodically halted for the dispatch of envoys and the negotiation of truces to permit the exchange of prisoners. Economically, this struggle resulted in a diminution in agricultural, commercial, and industrial activities. Radical demographic change took place as a result of the massive displacement of population. The chronicles paint a picture of devastation and of the abandonment of more exposed settlements in favor of less accessible sites. Life in areas that were regularly plundered meant yearly raids, constant insecurity, and frequent flights. This ongoing struggle was an integral part of both Muslim and Byzantine policy. The elucidation of a complete frontier, where fortified lines alternated with no man's land, carried with it the admission that, aside from habitual razzias and the inevitable Byzantine response, both sides had resigned themselves to the existence of an adversary who was there to stay.

BYZANTINE IMPERIAL AUTHORITY: RANK, TITULATURE, AND POWER

The rivalry that pitted the two powers against each other led several Muslim historians to synchronize the reigns of successive Byzantine emperors with those of contemporaneous Muslim caliphs to provide sequential or chronological lists of the Byzantine rulers. Al-Ya'qūbī records the names of the Roman and Byzantine rulers. Al-Ṭabarī includes the names of the Byzantine emperors from the beginning of the Christian era to the time of the Prophet and mentions the duration of their reigns, while Hamzah al-Iṣfahānī (d. after 350/961) lists the names of the kings of *al-Rūm* and the duration of their rule—without differentiating between Macedonia, Rome, and Byzantium.⁴ The most

detailed record is given by al-Mas'ūdī, who divided the history of *al-Rūm* into three main phases: the period of the *ḥunafā'*, the pagan Roman emperors who made Rome their capital (ending with Diocletian's reign, in A.D. 305); the period of Constantinople's Christian Roman emperors (commencing with the reign of Constantine the Great in A.D. 324 and ending with the death of Heraclius in A.D. 641); and the period of the Byzantine emperors after the rise of Islam.⁵ By providing such lists of Byzantine rulers, the sources were acknowledging their appreciation of the political, cultural, and administrative importance of Byzantium. Yet these compilations must also be considered within the context of the nascent culture's sense of belonging to a long line of traditional rulers on earth. Indeed, early Umayyad caliphs tried to inscribe themselves into a universal history of world empire. Caliph Yazid II (101–105/720–724) was creating an imaginary ancestry for himself, one that includes the earth's principal rulers, when he said,

I am the son of Kisra, and my father is Marwān;
Caesar is my grandfather, and my grandfather is the Khāqān.⁶

The family of kings was also mentioned in the context of the later *shu'ūbiyya* controversy, which was responsible for engendering a new interest in pre-Islamic nations and cultures through its comparative cultural debates. This literary controversy, which centered on the Arabs and the Persians, represented an attempt to determine and influence the cultural orientation of Muslim society. The classification of nations thus became a most pertinent subject, and the position of the Byzantines was, at times, an integral part of the discussion. In passages attempting to classify particular nations by their characteristics, Yahyā al-Barmakī writes that there are five kings in the world. The king of furniture is the king of China; the king of cattle is the king of the Turks; the king of money is the king of the Arabs; the king of elephants is the king of India; and the king of elixir is the king of the Byzantines.⁷ Al-Mas'ūdī provides the following classification:

The kings of China, of the Turks, of India . . . and the rest of the kings of the world have conceded that the king of Babylon ranks first among the kings of the earth. His standing among them is similar to the standing of the moon in relation to the stars because his domain is the loftiest, and he is the wealthiest, the most temperate in character, the best in management. . . . He is followed by the king of India, who is the king of wisdom and elephants. . . . He is followed in rank by the king of China. . . , who is followed by the king of *Rūm*, who is called the king of men, *malik al-rijāl*, because there is not on earth people more perfect in physiognomy or more handsome in visage.⁸

The classification in *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* of Šā'id al-Andalusī is similar: the king of the Byzantines is called the king of men because his subjects are the most handsome of all.⁹ In all these classifications, the Byzantine emperors are characterized on the basis of the beauty of their population and their personal knowledge of elixir: as great alchemists, they were believed to be capable of transforming copper into silver and gold. Thus, their charisma was associated with magical attributes, and they possessed a special kind of esoteric knowledge that provided the basis for their empire's wealth.

Several titles and terms are used in the Arabic-Islamic sources to refer to Byzantine emperors. The most common term is *malik* (king), which in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* has a negative connotation suggesting mere worldly authority. The Qur'ān speaks of a "king who confiscates every good ship" and quotes the queen of Sheba as remarking: "When kings enter a city, they pillage it and make its nobles destitute. Thus do kings."¹⁰ In the early Islamic centuries, *mulk* (kingship) was used as a term of condemnation to emphasize the difference between the manmade, impious, and arbitrary rule of worldly sovereigns and the divine and just rule of caliphs. So while the era of the Orthodox caliphs was referred to as *khilāfa* (caliphate), symbolizing piety and justice, the reign of the Umayyads came to be dismissed as *mulk* (the rule of usurpers and oppressors).¹¹ The paradigm of the king in Muslim tradition is the Byzantine emperor (*qayṣar*, caesar) and the

Sassanid shah (*kisra*). Jurists and traditionists regarded monarchical behavior as foreign to Islam, and the early Umayyads were accused by Muslims of following the practice (*sunna*) of the *Rūm* since their dynastic principle was seen as akin to Caesarism (*qayṣariyya*).¹² In the early third/ninth century, al-Jāḥiẓ explicitly states that the imamate became a Chosrean (Persian) kingdom and a Caesarean (Byzantine) usurpation under the Umayyads,¹³ meaning that the Umayyads accumulated power at the expense of their subjects either by introducing dynastic succession, by usurping power through the use of force, or by both means.

As may be inferred from the discussion above, the title of *qayṣar* (Caesar) was frequently used to refer to the ruler of Byzantium. Sometimes it appeared without the definite article and was used as a proper name. The term does not occur in the Qur'ān but is found in the *Sīra* of the Prophet, in *ḥadīth* collections, in Qur'ānic commentaries, and in works of history, geography, and *adab*. In *Kitāb al-bad' wa al-tārīkh*, it is said that Arabs called the kings of *Rūm qayāṣira wa harāqil* (Caesars or Heracluses). Ibn Khurradadbeh states that the Byzantine king is also called *basileus* (*bāsīlī*).¹⁴

The epithet *al-ṭāghīya*, which is found in the Qur'ān and implies insolence, presumptuous pride, and a disregard for God's law,¹⁵ was frequently used by Muslim writers to describe Byzantine emperors. Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik purportedly wrote a message to the Byzantine emperor addressed in the following way: "From Hishām b. 'Abd al-Malik, prince of the faithful, to *al-ṭāghīyya*, king of the *Rūm*."¹⁶ A Muslim prisoner in the Byzantine empire refers to the emperor as *ṭāghīya* and describes him as being "the greatest enemy of Islam and of the Muslims."¹⁷ Similarly, al-Qādī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974), serving under the Fatimids, calls the Byzantine emperor *ṭāghīyat al-Rūm* (the tyrant of the *Rūm*) and also *ṭāghīyat al-Qusṭanīniyya* (the tyrant of Constantinople).¹⁸ In particularly hostile contexts, the Byzantine emperor was addressed as *kalb al-Rūm* (the dog of the Byzantines).¹⁹ However, other common epithets that occur

in the Arabic texts are neutral, with no derogatory connotations. Such are the references to *ṣāḥib al-Rūm* (the leader of the *Rūm*) and *ʿaẓīm al-Rūm* (the most exalted among the Byzantines).

It is evident, then, that the Arab authors chose from a wide variety of titles and appellations to designate the emperors of Byzantium. While some terms, such as *kalb al-Rūm*, are plainly intended to belittle and insult, others, such as *malik* and *ṭāghīya*, represent attempts to strike at the very legitimacy of the emperors' rule. Nevertheless, in one and the same text, one may find both negative and neutral references to the Byzantine emperors, such as *ṭāghīyat al-Rūm* and *ṣāḥib al-Rūm*, existing side by side.²⁰

The texts are also able to provide us with some information on the Arabs' understanding of the Byzantine theory and practice of imperial power, as well as their assessment of the emperors' effectiveness in exercising political authority. Ibn Khurradadbeh fully realizes the importance of the political position and actual power of the Byzantine emperors when he states that "the Byzantine emperor possesses the greatest authority and [is accorded] the highest esteem. The emperor has full authority over warfare and taxation and he retains the power of the sword." As for dynastic succession, Ibn Khurradadbeh notes that kingship in Byzantium is not hereditary: "There are no codes that regulate imperial succession; it is open to anyone, including women. Only strength counts."²¹ Marwazī claims that Byzantine rulers who fail to achieve their ends are deposed and others elected in their place:

When the king has fought an enemy and comes back in triumph and victory, his rank and position in the kingdom grow. If, however, he has been defeated and proven to be too weak, he is dismissed from kingship and has no share in it, and someone else is appointed in his stead.²²

The failure of the Byzantine emperors to establish a system of familial succession to the throne significantly limited their impe-

rial power. Our texts reflect this lack of juridical clarity, which, in itself, partly explains the legitimacy of military success and the vitality of usurpation.²³

The power of the emperor was constricted in another way. Although church and state in the Byzantine empire were together joined in the person of the emperor, the Arab authors were aware of the separate authorities of the emperor and the patriarch. In *al-Tanbih*, al-Mas'ūdī lists their respective responsibilities:

The patriarch is the sovereign king of religion, and as the emperor has the power of the sword, the patriarch has authority over the See of Constantinople. The master of the See is the partner of the emperor. No other man is equal to the emperor, and before no other man does he bow. The emperor is the holder of the throne of iron: questions of war expenditures, tax collection, and the payment of soldiers are his responsibility. By contrast, the revenues of the pious foundations for the upkeep of churches, monasteries, bishops, and monks are the responsibility of the patriarch.²⁴

Al-Mas'ūdī thus clearly delineates the separate spheres and duties of emperor and patriarch. Similarly, Marwazī states that "over all of the *Rūm* is a man called patriarch, who is the lord of religion. The king exalts him, humiliates himself before him, and does not oppose him in any of his concerns."²⁵

THE BYZANTINE EMPERORS AND

HĀRŪN AL-RASHĪD

The last decades of the second/eighth century and the early third/ninth century witnessed the development of direct diplomatic links between the Byzantine and Abbasid courts. The apogee of the early Abbasid caliphate, particularly the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (170–193/786–809), saw a complex and many-faceted relationship unfold between the two states. During his reign, the war against Byzantium became a primary concern of the Abbasid state. Hārūn al-Rashīd's personal involve-

ment in these wars before and after he became caliph resonates in these lines of verse:

The *thughūr* are blocked by Hārūn, and through him
the ropes of the Muslim state are firmly plaited
His banner is forever tied with victory;
he has an army before which armies scatter.
All of the kings of the *Rūm* give him *jizya*
unwillingly, perforce, out of hand in humiliation.²⁶

Laudatory descriptions of this renowned Abbasid ruler emphasize his piety, for he is said to have spent alternating years of his reign leading the pilgrimage to Mecca and the assault against Byzantium. These carefully controlled campaigns against Byzantine territory were not merely strategic but highly symbolic because the enterprise of conquest there boasted a romantic historical pedigree stretching back to the era of the prophet Muḥammad and of the Rāshidūn caliphs.²⁷

Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd maintained relations with Empress Irene and Emperors Constantine VI and Nicephorus I. The depiction of these three Byzantine rulers in the Arabic-Islamic texts reveals that specific historical relationships inform the material and perspectives extant in these sources. Thus, the Arab Muslim reports on the three rulers were not constructed in isolation from historical reality but were instead the product of dialogue, representing a response to the fluctuating relationship between empire and caliphate.

The Arab Muslim authors, and especially al-Mas'ūdī, mention Irene (A.D. 797–802) in their lists of Byzantine emperors but fail to exhibit any particular surprise, interest, or disquiet at the idea of a female emperor. They merely state that there were no males in Irene's family who were fit to rule and that she acquired her position as emperor because she was the mother of the heir to the throne. That women could be accorded supreme powers, commemorated as rulers, acclaimed in public ceremonies, and held responsible for official documents and imperial policy was not an ordinary phenomenon, and the fact that the Arab Mus-

lim authors chose not to question it or elaborate on it is peculiar and significant in light of Arabic-Islamic tradition. The idea of a woman caliph was unthinkable, as is indicated by the fact that in the Arabic language there is no feminine form for the words *caliph* or *imām*. While there is a feminine form for the word *king* (namely, *malika*), like its masculine counterpart, it refers to domination by force and excludes the spiritual dimension of authority.²⁸ More important, perhaps, as a reflection of the Islamic position on the question is the well-known *hadīth* in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī that states that "those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity."²⁹

The basic material on Empress Irene in the Arabic-Islamic sources is well informed. Al-Ṭabarī states that the "sovereign [in masculine form] of the Byzantines was Augusta, wife of Leon, because her son was a minor at the death of his father."³⁰ This use of the masculine form for *ṣāḥib* calls to mind the fact that when Irene took power, she did so as an honorary man, using male titles to denote her status and projecting herself into male ritual and male definition of imperial majesty.³¹ The sources tell us of battles in which Irene initially confronted Hārūn, son of caliph al-Mahdī (158–169/775–785), and the subsequent peace treaty by which she promised to pay a rich tribute to the Abbasid state for three consecutive years. Irene continued sending gifts to the caliph until her son came of age and began to wreak havoc. Constantine reportedly violated the agreement with Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd and his injustice, tyranny, and vice became obvious to his subjects. Fearing the caliph's attack, Irene ordered that Constantine's eyes be exposed to a heated mirror, and in this way, he was blinded.³² The blinding of Constantine VI was thus explained by the Arab authors in terms of Arab-Byzantine relations. Irene's act was not seen as indicative of her own political ambitions; rather, it was the act of an able stateswoman who placed the interest of the empire above everything else, even her own son. The rule of Constantine VI was portrayed as detrimental to the empire as his rash behavior was putting the Byzantine territories in danger of serious attack by

their powerful neighbor. The Arab authors do not condemn the cruel act of blinding. In fact, they seem to condone it, in view of Constantine's tyrannical rule and, more to the point, his aggressive policy against the Arabs. This contrasts with the Byzantine reaction to the blinding. Whatever the degree of Constantine's unpopularity, the deed was generally abhorred. Irene's cruel act shocked even her partisans and clouded her memory in spite of her leading role in restoring icon veneration at the Seventh Ecumenical Council in A.D. 787.³³

During his brief tenure, Constantine VI pursued an aggressive eastern policy that led Hārūn al-Rashīd to send him a letter from the Mesopotamian frontier town of al-Raqqā in 180–1/796. The letter, drafted by the secretary at the chancellery, Muḥammad b. al-Layth, is essentially composed of two parts: a diplomatic document and an apologetic treatise, which addresses questions of war and peace. The Abbasid caliph invited Emperor Constantine to choose between conversion to Islam or the payment of the *jizya*. Significantly, he reminded the emperor of all the advantages incurred by various categories of the Byzantine population as a result of the earlier treaty between Empress Irene and Caliph al-Mahdī, and the disruption of frontier life as a result of the resumption of fighting:

You well know that, through *fidya*, God accorded to each of your categories and each of your classes considerable good and great advantages in several areas. Among these I mention: The fact that your army leaders and commanders . . . were freed to face your other enemies . . . living in tranquility, security, and ease with their wives, children, and families, . . . whereas today they are awaiting armies from every pass, fearing death at any moment. . . . The fact that your laborers and artisans were quick to rework their land and repair whatever they disposed of . . . ; they spread out in order to rebuild and to innovate in agricultural methods; they abandoned the summits of the mountains and the beds of marshes and went, in the midst of their dwellings, . . . digging canals, planting trees, and causing springs to burst forth, in such a way that they prospered. Their situation flourished, and their mountains became

fertile . . . , whereas today they are prevented from cultivating their lands. . . . Diverted by other activities like the repair of the implements of war, the protection of their families in the fortresses, . . . they have abandoned the wheat fields, the fertile lands, and the water canals for the arid mountains. . . . The fact that the holders of capital and the merchants of cattle were reaching our lands and markets . . . in order to expand further their commerce and sell their merchandise. . . . Prosperity was general and profit was easy to such an extent that it reached the shepherds in their mountains and the women at their spinning wheels. . . . The fact that those who reside in the extremities of your empire . . . having tasted such days, the pleasure of a secure and leisurely life, were guarded against the prospect of seeing their wives captive, their children massacred, their flocks and herds destroyed, their trees and produce ruined and their homes abandoned, their men taken captive, their exile far away from home.³⁴

Here Harūn al-Rashīd contrasts the great disruption caused by Constantine's policy with the tangible benefits the Byzantine empire previously enjoyed through the payment of tribute, reminding the emperor that he might again purchase peace and return to such halcyon days. As a result of the earlier truce, the Byzantines had been able to devote their energy to agriculture, trade, and family life; exchanging all of these advantages for a state of war would result in continuous expectations of raids, massacres, captivity, and the displacement of populations. Naturally, the caliph was upholding a peace that was advantageous to the caliphate. But perhaps the greatest significance of this epistle is that it reflects the only gradually acquired sense of confidence of a caliphate at its apogee, as, toward the end, it assures the emperor that he need feel no shame or disgrace in agreeing to pay the *jizya* to a member of the Prophet's family—namely, the Abbasid caliph.

The portrayals of Irene and Constantine VI are revealing of a particular period in which the political and military relations between the Byzantine and Muslim states affected the respective images of these Byzantine rulers. Traditional historiography is

hostile to queens with full powers, as witnessed by the negative traditions concerning the pre-Islamic queens, Balqis and Zenobia, and, in a later period, the queens of Georgia.³⁵ Thus, the uncritical tone that transpires in the Arabic-Islamic sources with respect to Irene may largely be attributed to her defensive and pacific attitude toward the Arabs. By contrast, Constantine's aggressive policy is decried by the sources to such an extent that his blinding by his own mother is mentioned but given no further elaboration. The attitude toward Nicephorus I is more ambivalent.

Nicephorus I succeeded Empress Irene following a palace revolt in A.D. 802. The Muslims now acquired a far more dangerous adversary than his predecessor had ever been. The way he is portrayed in the Arab sources reflects the tense relations that ensued between the new emperor and Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. In the list of the Byzantine emperors that al-Mas'ūdī provides in *al-Tanbih*, Nicephorus is listed as the thirty-eighth Byzantine emperor and as having ruled for seven years and three months during the reigns of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170/786–193/809) and al-Amin (r. 193/809–198/813). Al-Mas'ūdī also provides information on Nicephorus's position before he became emperor, correctly stating that Nicephorus was in charge of tax collection. Nicephorus had actually spent his entire career in the financial administration, becoming a logothete of the treasury. His experience meant that he was well prepared to assess and direct the financial and economic affairs of the empire once he assumed control. He reorganized the administration, adopting new financial measures that his Byzantine contemporary, Theophanes, criticized as terribly oppressive. Indeed, Theophanes provides a list of Nicephorus's tax exactions explaining that he had made "a succinct and brief record of these actions—and they are but a small part—in order to indicate this man's inventiveness in all manner of greed."³⁶ However, modern historians of Byzantium do not view Nicephorus's financial measures as having been oppressive. Al-Mas'ūdī and other Arab Muslim authors fail to mention the issue at all, although the Arab geogra-

pher, Ibn Hawqal, says that the financial exactions of a later emperor, Nicephorus Phocas, was the main source of the complaints of the populace.³⁷

The Arab Muslim historians assigned Arab origins to Nicephorus I. Al-Mas'ūdī states that he is a Ghassanid of the Banū Jafna.³⁸ He is described as a descendant of Jabala b. al-Ayham, the last Arabian Ghassanid king, who played a role in encounters between the Arabs and the Byzantines during the early Muslim conquests. The Ghassanids were the most powerful of the *foederati* that Byzantium employed, and their last king, Jabala b. al-Ayham, converted to Islam during the reign of Emperor Heraclius. Unsettled, however, by the principle of equality that Islam brought with it, he fled to the Byzantine territories, where he once again professed Christianity.³⁹

Another tradition assigns Nicephorus to another Christian tribe, that of the Iyād, which had emigrated to *bilād al-shām* from Mesopotamia during the caliphate of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb.⁴⁰ Some of the Iyād subsequently became Christianized and, in 17/638, joined the Byzantine army that was then campaigning to regain Syria. The legend that asserted Nicephorus's Arab origins also gave credence to the idea that the Byzantine emperor knew Arabic. Reportedly, he valued the Arabic poetry of Abū al-'Atāhiya, known to Nicephorus through one of his ambassadors who had memorized some of his verses. Abū al-'Atāhiya, alternatively favored and marginalized by Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, devoted himself, at one point, to ascetic poetry (*zuhdiyyāt*), describing the fleeting vanity of the material world and calling on men to renounce it and repent in the time remaining to them.⁴¹ A connection may be made between the sentiments expressed in these verses and Nicephorus's own ascetic tendencies: it seems that Nicephorus took George of Amastis as his spiritual advisor, and some sources close to the emperor report that "in private, besides fasting and praying, Nicephorus wore shabby clothing and slept on the floor."⁴²

Most references to Nicephorus (Naqfūr, in Arabic) in the Arabic-Islamic sources occur in the context of his correspon-

dence with Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd. One of the first decisions that Nicephorus made after taking the throne was to discontinue the payments of the tribute authorized by Empress Irene. In fact, al-Mas'ūdī states that Nicephorus used Irene's payment of tribute to the Muslim caliph as a pretext to conspire against her and remove her from power.⁴³

Al-Ṭabarī cites a letter that the emperor sent to the caliph in the year 187/802 in which he denounces the truce signed by his predecessor, Irene:

The queen who reigned before me gave you the position of the tower and placed herself in the position of a simple pawn. She paid the tribute that was once imposed upon you. . . . This [circumstance] was the consequence of the frailty and foolishness of women. When you receive my letter, send back the money that you have received from her, and ransom yourself by paying the sums that are incumbent on you. Otherwise, the sword will decide between us.

Hārūn al-Rashīd furiously wrote back: "From Hārūn, Commander of the Faithful, to Nicephorus, the Dog of the *Rūm* [*kalb al-Rūm*]: I have read your letter, O son of an infidel woman. You shall not hear my reply but shall see it with your own eyes."⁴⁴ Hārūn gave the Byzantine emperor the epithet "dog," which is considered an unclean animal and a base creature.⁴⁵ Hārūn marched immediately against Nicephorus, and in *Kitāb al-aghānī*, Hārūn is said to have arrived at the road leading directly to Constantinople, which he found obstructed by trees that Nicephorus had felled and kindled in the road.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the emperor, being preoccupied with the revolt of Bardanes, offered to pay tribute in return for peace. But while on the road back to Raqqa, Hārūn al-Rashīd received news that the Byzantine emperor had broken his promise. Verses of Arabic poetry have survived denouncing Nicephorus's perfidy in breaking the truce:

Nicephorus has violated the truce that you granted him,
but the wheel of fortune will turn against him.

Nicephorus, if you betray once the Imām is away,
 it is because of your ignorance and blindness.
 He has paid the *jizya* and fear of the sword has made him bow his
 head,
 or death is what he dreads.
 Do you really believe that you will escape your fate?
 What you believe is but a simple illusion.⁴⁷

The poet, Abū al-‘Atāhiya, said on the same occasion:

The world has manifested its pleasure to Hārūn,
 and Nicephorus has become a *dhimmī* to the Imām.⁴⁸

Reacting to Nicephorus's betrayal, Hārūn invaded Heraclea in 190/805–806, and the city's conquest had a profound and inspiring influence on Arab Muslim authors and poets.⁴⁹

The texts relate that Nicephorus sent to Hārūn al-Rashīd the *kharāj* (land tax) and the *jizya* for himself and for all of the inhabitants of the empire; the total sum amounted to 50,000 dinars. He paid four dinars for himself and two dinars for his son. While the term *jizya* refers to the capitation tax required of non-Muslims living under Muslim protection, the Arab Muslim authors use the term here to signify the humiliation of both empire and emperōr and stress the Byzantines' inferior status as indicated by their dependence on Muslim protection. The inhabitants of the Byzantine empire are hence made out to be living in the same condition of subjugation as the Christian population of the Muslim empire.

The negative references to Nicephorus I found in the Arabic Islamic sources contrast his aggressive policy with the peaceful relations that had obtained during the rule of Empress Irene. The texts denigrate his status by calling him *kalb al-Rūm*, accuse him of treachery, and promise him ultimate defeat. Nevertheless, al-Mas'ūdī portrays him as the initiator of major reforms and new institutions in the Byzantine Empire. For example, the historian states that Nicephorus I was the first to name his own son as his heir to the throne, observing: "This had never been the case among previous Byzantine emperors." Emperor Nice-

phorus was also, according to al-Mas'ūdī, the first emperor to have grown a beard. He describes Nicephorus as refusing to shave, saying that such an act was "an attempt to change the creation of the Creator."⁵⁰ Al-Mas'ūdī was mistaken on both accounts. Earlier Byzantine emperors had appointed a son as coemperor and heir, and a survey of existing portraits of emperors taken from coins, statues, and mosaics indicates that as early as the reign of Phocas (r. A.D. 602–610) "we find an emperor with a really distinctive beard, a custom that remained until the end."⁵¹

Another innovation attributed to Nicephorus is the new title he assumed, which appeared at the beginning of his decrees and letters. Instead of a previous title King of the Christians, Nicephorus is supposed to have changed it to King of the *Rūm*, maintaining that the former was untrue: "This is a lie; I am not the king of the Christians, I am the king of the *Rūm*, and kings do not lie."⁵² One immediate explanation for this change in titlature may be drawn from developments in the West; namely, the coronation of Charles the Great as emperor by Pope Leo III on 25 December 800.⁵³ The construction of a parallel Christian empire in the West entailed a great loss of prestige for Byzantium. Although Empress Irene and Emperor Nicephorus did not recognize the new emperor, Michael I Rangabe did acknowledge him in A.D. 812. An actual change in Byzantine titlature seems to have taken place after this date, as the designation of Basileus (emperor) was gradually superseded by the title Basileus Romaion (emperor of the Romans).⁵⁴

It is difficult to assess to what degree, if any, al-Mas'ūdī and the other Arab authors were aware of these developments and their theoretical implications for the Byzantine Empire. Al-Mas'ūdī was well acquainted with Christian sources in his own eastern environment. Furthermore, Frankish sources mention exchanges of embassies between Charlemagne and Hārūn al-Rashīd. Thus, the reference to the change in the emperor's title found in al-Mas'ūdī might credibly be the result of information drawn from some Christian source. However, his interpretation

may have very little to do with developments in the Byzantine empire or the West and might instead be the consequence of particular events involving Baghdad's Christian communities in his own times. An incident that was not contemporaneous with Nicephorus I but that did occur in the time of al-Mas'ūdī may provide a clue for this assertion. According to Bar Hebraeus, the increase in numbers of the Christian Melkites resident in Baghdad led them to demand that a metropolitan be established in the Abbasid capital. The Catholicos of the Nestorians, Abraham III (r. A.D. 905-936), successfully maneuvered to prevent the Catholicos of the Melkites from holding this title. The ceremony of consecration was interrupted by the Nestorians, who accused the Melkites of having a double allegiance and a dubious loyalty. They charged them with praying for the victory of the Byzantine emperor whereas "we [Nestorians] have only one king, that of the Muslims." The vizier, 'Alī b. 'Isa, imposed a fine on the Melkite patriarch and made him sign, in A.D. 913, an undertaking that forbade the Melkite community from having a catholicos in Baghdad.⁵⁵ These polemics, which reflected the deep divisions among the eastern Christians, and the clear statement by the Nestorians that the Byzantine emperor was not their king might have led al-Mas'ūdī to formulate the emperor's more restricted authority.

Nicephorus is also said to have prevented his subjects from calling the Arabs "saracenos," which means the slaves of Sarah. Nicephorus said that this, too, was a lie.⁵⁶ The term was one of many used by classical and ecclesiastical authors to refer to Arabs; in time, it became the most common. Ecclesiastical historians etymologized the term along pejorative lines, with Sozomen, for instance, suggesting that the Arabs had begun to refer to themselves by a name that emphasized their relationship to Sarah in order to avoid the opprobrium attached to their descent from the concubine slave Hagar.⁵⁷ There is no record, however, that the Arabs ever used it to refer to themselves.

Despite the insulting letters he exchanged with the celebrated Hārūn al-Rashīd and the wars that they fought, Nicephorus's

characterization, in at least one major source, is surprisingly flattering. His depiction in al-Mas'ūdī as God-fearing and honest is unexpected. Moreover, al-Mas'ūdī associates Nicephorus I with change and with the initiation of a number of practices. Quite possibly, however, these references are better relegated to the "knowledge of the Firsts [*al-awā'il*]," a branch of Muslim literature, than to the historical record. Reports on *awā'il*, many of which might be called myths of origin, sought to answer the question, "Who was first?" The question was asked in connection with a large number of subjects and often answered in a fanciful manner.⁵⁸ The perception of Nicephorus I, is, thus, complicated by the intersection of a literary genre and results in a composite image and an inconclusive portrayal of this third/ninth century Byzantine emperor.

BYZANTINE KNOWLEDGE: SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

From the Muslim point of view, there was a major qualitative difference between wars against the Byzantine Christians and wars on Islam's other frontiers. Among the peoples of the steppes and the jungles and even in the midst of the great civilizations of China and India—of which they had limited knowledge or understanding—Muslims saw no recognizable alternatives to Islam.⁵⁹ By contrast, the struggle against Byzantium was an unceasing campaign against a rival religious and political system that challenged the very foundations of Islam's universal mission and competed with it in terms that were both familiar and intelligible.

As stated earlier, the first half of the third/ninth century was a period of regular warfare between the Byzantine and Abbasid empires. In A.D. 829, two years after Byzantium lost Crete, the reign of Emperor Theophilus (r. A.D. 829–842) began, only to be spent in hostilities with Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198–218/813–833) and his successor, Caliph al-Mu'taṣim (r. 218–227/833–842). Arabic poetry reflects this sustained war effort. The third/

ninth century poets al-Buḥturī and Abū Tammām composed verses in praise of the caliphs, emirs, and generals who led forces against the Byzantines. Both poets composed, for instance, verses in acclaiming Abū Saʿīd, who undertook repeated incursions into Byzantine territory. Abū Tammām describes the victorious march of Abū Saʿīd into the Byzantine provinces, the battles, and the Byzantine prisoners who were taken captives.⁶⁰ Alluding to military developments in connection with the battle at the river ʿAqarqas, he addresses Abū Saʿīd:

At the river ʿAqarqas you upheld until the end,
in order to go to battle, a rapid rigorous march.
Religion had called you and Islam had requested your help
against danger, like one who is drowning.
The day of Bakr ibn Wāʿil at Qidāt is well inferior
to the day of the impious Khurramite;
On that day only locks of hair were cut,
on this day the throats of the Byzantines were cut off.⁶¹

In A.D. 837, Theophilus reopened an offensive that was extremely successful. He captured and burned the fortress of Zibātra, making a great impression on Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim who launched a counterattack penetrating, at the head of a large army, deep into Asia Minor. He captured Amorium, the birthplace of the ruling dynasty, "the eye and foundation of Christianity," in the exaggerated words of al-Ṭabarī.⁶² Arab poets celebrated this event—most notably Abū Tammām, in his famous ode composed for this occasion.⁶³

Between A.D. 809 and 842, the Arabs achieved no long-term strategic results, although they did score some notable successes. They were becoming weaker, and this would allow the Byzantines to strengthen their own position later in the century. After A.D. 842, Islamic imperial ambitions evaporated; all that remained was a defensive policy aimed at keeping the Byzantine border weak and porous and protecting the Euphrates-Mediterranean commercial route.⁶⁴ With the Byzantine victory of A.D. 863, the Byzantines would once again be on the offensive.

Al-Buḥturī praises Caliph al-Muʿtazz (r. 252–255/866–869) in connection with the continued war effort against the Byzantines during this period:

May you live for us, for a long time, Muʿtazz, our *imām*,
from whom we expect favors.

His steadiness banishes all weakness,
and his zeal watches over the religion of God.

He has sent his army into the territory of the infidels
or toward the frontier to block it.

The leader of the *Rūm* [*ʿaḍīm al-Rūm*] has collided with your resolve,
and his troops were dispersed.⁶⁵

The Byzantine empire had become the major political, military, and cultural rival to the now well-established Islamic state. Knowledge of Byzantium was imperative for the survival and prestige of the Islamic empire. The cultural dimension is stressed in *al-Tanbīh*, where al-Masʿūdī explains that he confined his treatment of non-Muslim peoples to the kingdoms of the Persians, the ancient Greeks, and the *Rūm* on cultural grounds: "The two kingdoms of ancient Greece and the *Rūm* came next to Persia in greatness and glory; moreover, they were gifted in the various branches of philosophy and the sciences and were admirable craftsmen." In addition, unlike ancient Greece and Persia, the empire of the *Rūm* still possessed firmly established institutions and a highly organized administration.⁶⁶

During the third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries, the Abbasid empire exhibited a cultural dynamism as it sought to appropriate the legacy of the ancient world. Contacts made between four well-known Byzantine intellectuals and the Abbasid caliphate are representative of this phenomenon. Between A.D. 829 and 907, John the Grammarian, St. Constantine/Cyril, Photios, and Leo Choïrosphaktes traveled to the Abbasid court. The fact that these four distinguished Byzantines, renowned for their secular knowledge, were sent on embassies to the caliphate suggests that philosophical discussion was on the agenda. More-

over, this effort may also reflect the imperial government's concern "to convince the critical minds of the Abbasid court that the wisdom of the Greeks was still, contrary to rumors, alive and well in Christian lands."⁶⁷

It was in this turbulent century, when Arab-Byzantine warfare experienced many vicissitudes, that the Muslims sponsored the systematic translation of ancient Greek texts principally obtained from Byzantium. By contrast, the Byzantines had, in the meantime, developed an aversion to Greek pagan learning, and Byzantine scholars paint a relatively bleak picture of the status of Greek secular manuscripts in the empire during the time of their translation into Arabic. John Haldon has emphasized that "there is, after the late A.D. 620s and early 630s, and up until the later eighth or early ninth century, a more or less complete disappearance of secular literary forms within the Empire."⁶⁸

The Greco-Arabic translation movement is a complex social phenomenon, and "no single circumstance, set of events, or personality can be singled out as its cause." What seems clear is that the translation movement was very much connected to the foundation of the Abbasid capital, Baghdad, and the special needs of the society inhabiting it.⁶⁹ Although the contributions of Caliph al-Ma'mūn, who supported the translation of Greek works, are the most famous, going well beyond the efforts of his predecessors, the patronage of translators by physicians, scholars, and courtiers had begun as early as the late second/eighth century.⁷⁰ One consequence of the movement was the importance given to delineating the differences between Byzantine civilization and the learning of the ancient Greeks. It was the literati of the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, men like Ibn al-Muqaffa' and al-Jāhīz, who first brought into sharp focus the question of what exactly had the ancient nations contributed to the corpus of contemporary knowledge. Once the subject was broached, a heated discussion arose over the actual contribution of the Byzantines to the scientific knowledge that the Muslims were intent on acquiring from them.

In *al-Radd 'ala al-naṣāra*, al-Jāhīz insisted that science and

wisdom belonged to the ancient Greeks, a nation that had disappeared leaving only the vestiges of their reason (*athār 'uqūlihim*). These ancient Greeks, he observes, had a different religion and a different literature than the Byzantines:

The *Rūm* are not '*ulamā*: they are artisans [*ṣunnā*] who took to writing because of their geographical proximity to the land of the ancient Greeks. The *Rūm* subsequently attributed to themselves some of the books of the ancient Greeks. Since the *Rūm* could not change the names of the most famous Greek authors, they ended by claiming that the *Yūnān* are actually a tribe of the *Rūm*. . . . *Kitāb al-Manṭiq* and *Kitāb al-Kawn wa al-Fasād* were written by Aristotle, who was neither Byzantine [*Rūm*] nor Christian; the *Almagest* was written by Ptolemy, and he was neither Byzantine nor Christian; the *Elements* was written by Euclid, and he was neither Byzantine nor Christian; medical books were written by Galen, who [also] was neither Byzantine nor Christian; and similarly with the books by Democritus, Hippocrates, Plato, and many others who were neither Byzantine nor Christian. . . . In reality, the Christians and the *Rūm* have neither science, nor expository literature, nor vision, and their names should be erased from the registers of the philosophers and the sages.⁷¹

This philhellenic and anti-Byzantine attitude has been explained most recently as stemming from contemporaneous events: the state of total warfare that al-Ma'mūn had initiated against the Byzantines. Dimitri Gutas suggests that the Byzantines were portrayed as deserving Muslim attack not only because they were infidels but because they were also culturally benighted and inferior, both to Muslims and to their own ancestors, the Greeks. This interpretation suggests that the Muslims saw themselves as superior due to their adherence to Islam and their appreciation of ancient Greek science and wisdom, which they were translating into Arabic.⁷²

The anti-Byzantine rhetoric among Muslim intellectuals continued in the following century, and its expression in the work of al-Mas'ūdī is highly representative. The great cultural historian of the fourth/tenth century says that the *Rūm* were neighbors to

the ancient Greeks and, at a certain point in time, defeated and conquered them, annexing their territory and assimilating their people. He likens their history to that of the Nabateans and the Sassanians, with the exception that the ancient Greeks and the *Rūm* did not subsequently maintain separate genealogies. In his eyes, the *Rūm*, who replaced the Greeks, were but pale imitators. Noting their different ethnic origin, he deems their language to be poorer and less pure.⁷³ Al-Tawḥīdī, similarly, distinguishes between the ancient Greeks and the Byzantines. He mentions, during one discussion, that "the *Yūnān* possessed the qualities of deduction, research, and discovery." Quoting Ibn al-Muqaffa', he goes further to say that the *Rūm* are skilled only in architecture and geometry. This distinction was also maintained by the logicians and philosophers of the fourth/tenth century. The logicians were proud of their knowledge of antiquity and had a deep admiration for classical philosophy. They were convinced of the superiority of Greek wisdom and the Greek language, a conviction that is echoed in the works of the philosopher, Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā al-Rāzī (d. 313/925), who states: "We also found it a generally valid proposition that no other nation has a more subtle flair, nor a more manifest wisdom, than the Greek nation."⁷⁴ Šā'id al-Andalusī states that the Romans had, in Rome and other towns, eminent sages and learned men well versed in the different branches of philosophy. He finds fault with the common assertion that the celebrated philosophers were *Rūm*, noting:

The truth is that they are *Yūnān* [ancient Greeks]. However, due to the contact between these two nations—namely, the *Yūnān* and the *Rūm*—and to the close proximity of their countries, and due to the transfer of power from one to the other, the two became one country and one unified empire, so that the *Rūm* and the Greeks were amalgamated and it became difficult to distinguish between the philosophers of the two nations. Those who possess sound knowledge of history and know the biographies of great men believe that both of these nations were famous for their interest in philosophy. Nevertheless, the ancient Greeks enjoyed a dis-

tion and a superiority in this respect that was contested neither by the *Rūm* nor by anyone else.⁷⁵

Marwazī, writing in the fifth/eleventh century, also states:

And as to the sciences and occult philosophies and other worthy matters that are attributed to them [the *Rūm*], they do not truly belong to them but to the Ionian sages who mixed with them and who are celebrated for the subtlety of their thought and the keenness of their intelligence in what they have discovered of sciences and created of philosophy.⁷⁶

Like the Hellenes of late antiquity, who were convinced that the rise of Christianity meant the end of Greek science,⁷⁷ Muslim authors blamed the decline of science and philosophy on the Christianization of the Roman empire. Ironically, the Byzantines had turned their backs on ancient science because of Christianity, while the Muslims had welcomed it because of Islam. This anti-Byzantine and anti-Christian attitude is again reflected in the works of al-Jāhīz, the propagandist of al-Ma'mūn and of his Mu'tazilite successors:

The Byzantines believe that there are three gods. . . . If we had not seen it with our own eyes and heard it with our own ears, we would not consider it true. We would not believe that a people of religious philosophers, physicians, astronomers, diplomats, arithmeticians, secretaries, and masters in every discipline could say that a man who, as they themselves have seen, ate, drank, urinated, excreted, suffered hunger and thirst, dressed and undressed, gained and lost [weight], who later, as they assume, was crucified and killed, is Lord and Creator.⁷⁸

In questioning their intelligence, al-Jāhīz brings forth the idea that, in their material existence, the people belonging to the civilized nations—that is, the Indians, the Persians, the Arabs, and the Byzantines—may exhibit diverse intellectual qualities; however, when comparing the intellectual sphere to the spiritual one, he is shocked by the antinomy, for their religious systems—with the exception of Islam—are literally incredible.⁷⁹ Thus, Christian beliefs are presented as being inherently irrational, and a

veiled warning lies in the observation that this regrettable situation may even befall an otherwise enlightened people. Dimitri Gutas underlines the allusion to Islamic society in this argument, noting that Muslims were being urged to realize the risk of lapsing into a similar irrationality if they followed the anthropomorphic ideas of certain Muslims then current.⁸⁰

Al-Mas'ūdī also adheres to the view that scientific and philosophical decline were a direct consequence of the Christianization of the Roman empire. He emphasizes that the scientific and philosophical contribution of classical Greece made it the greatest repository of such knowledge, for the Greeks had apparently absorbed the scientific heritages of other nations and developed them to their highest level. The Greek contribution was such that al-Mas'ūdī affirms that wisdom (*ḥikma*) itself was Greek. *Ḥikma* was the term that the rational sciences adopted as the description of their subject matter, in particular, the natural sciences and the philosophical sciences. In the fourth/tenth century, two notions relating to *ḥikma* were developing—first, that *ḥikma* migrates from nation to nation; second, that it appears and disappears due to complex causes. A limited number of nations were concerned with theoretical learning, and the migration of *ḥikma* across time took place within a limited circle that consisted of the Persians, Chaldeans, Hebrews, Greeks, Byzantines, Egyptians, and Arabs.⁸¹

Al-Mas'ūdī believed that when Christianity triumphed in the Roman empire, it all but obliterated Greek wisdom, noting: "The sciences remained strong and well-rooted until the time when Christianity spread among the *Rūm*." Christianity struck a fatal blow to the scientific edifice: the vestiges of science disappeared, its methods were erased, and all that the ancient Greeks had demonstrated, proved, and discovered was gone. A similar statement is found in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm. In his chapter on the philosophers, Ibn al-Nadīm says that philosophy was prevalent among the Greeks and the *Rūm* until the appearance of Christianity. When the *Rūm* became Christians, philosophy became a forbidden subject; some works of philosophy were

burned, while others were hidden away. People were prevented from discussing any philosophical subject if it went against prophetic teaching. The famous Muslim philosopher al-Farābī (d. 339/950) also notes that the ancient Greek philosophers were so celebrated that the Roman emperor Augustus ordered that copies of their works be disseminated for educational purposes. This state of affairs continued until the coming of Christianity, when after a meeting of the bishops in Alexandria, it was decided to exclude a large number of these texts from the curriculum, leaving only whatever would help confirm Christians in their faith.⁸²

The judge 'Abd al-Jabbār writes that Emperor Constantine the Great (r. A.D. 324–337) closely examined the activities and claims of the philosophers and, judging the latter to be false, burned their books, destroyed their temples, and killed them, leaving none of them alive in Athens, then known as the city of philosophers. The only survivors were peasants, tanners, and dyers. Temples were converted into churches and filled with monks, and all of the books of philosophy and medicine were burned.⁸³ Writing in the Almohad court, Abū Yahyā b. Mas'ada similarly places the blame for the decline of science on Constantine the Great:

And what you boasted concerning the students of astronomy and of the knowledge of arithmetic and analytics is like the boasting of the slave girl over the howdah of her lady. That honor belongs to the Greek and Sassanian discoverers, to the priests of Babel, Chaldea, and Kashan who were masters of the natural and exact sciences; they were the Pythagorean generation and the philosophers of Hermes. These were landmarks whose remains your kings erased and whose lights they extinguished through the aberration of your King Constantine.⁸⁴

These traditions, prevalent in the sources, were adamant in criticizing the state of philosophy and the sciences in the Byzantine empire. They all stress that the decline began in the fourth century A.D. and that Christianity was its root cause.

At times, utter contempt was expressed by the Arab authors toward Byzantine scientific knowledge, as in the words of Ibn al-Farrāʾ, who states that the *Rūm* are equal in dullness and in their ignorance of scientific knowledge.⁸⁵ The geographer Ibn al-Faqīh relates an anecdote in which the heroes are the Sassanian king Chosroes Anushirvan (r. A.D. 531–579) and his physician, Zarashid. Zarashid had lived in the land of the *Rūm*, learned their language, and read their books. Anushirvan asked his physician about the scientific knowledge of the Byzantines, and Zarashid described it as minimal. He said that the boastful among them bragged about their books of logic, for logic was their goal; as for their knowledge of medicine, the Byzantines know only about the humors: "And they treat fever and chills, as well as excessive bile and phlegm, with drugs." Zarashid added that the Byzantines had very little to add to what was already known of astronomy.⁸⁶

Yet while many Arab Muslim authors tried to depreciate Byzantine ability in the scientific and philosophical domains by crediting the ancient Greeks with being the source of all such knowledge, their assessment of Byzantine scientific knowledge nonetheless reveals a great deal of ambivalence. Taken as a body, statements in a variety of sources stretching over more than two centuries are conflicting and contradictory. For instance, al-Jāhīz says that the "*Rūm* are a nation of theologians, physicians, astronomers, wise men, and arithmeticians, and they possess the rules of music." Ibn al-Faqīh states that, in addition to being craftsmen, the Byzantines are also philosophers and physicians. Al-Muṭaḥhar al-Maqdisī stresses their knowledge of medicine. In particular, he states that this science flourished in the cities of Jundishapur, Tustar, and Ahwāz following the capture of Byzantines by the Persian king Shapur and their settlement in those cities. Al-Tawḥīdī also states that each nation (*umma*), each people (*qawm*), and each grouping has its own virtues and defects: the *Rūm*, for instance, excel in science and wisdom—they know nothing else.⁸⁷

Moreover, the Arabs could not deny that Byzantium was the

repository of ancient Greek knowledge. The Arab authors appreciated the fact that the Byzantines had preserved the ancient material and were grateful that they had allowed the Muslims to copy and translate it. There is a legend that Caliph al-Ma'mūn wrote to the Byzantine emperor asking permission to obtain a selection of old scientific manuscripts stored and treasured in Byzantine territory. Al-Ma'mūn sent forth a group of men who brought the books selected from what they had found. Ishaq b. Shahrām, an envoy to the Byzantine emperor in the late fourth/tenth century, mentions an old temple in the Byzantine country, which had been closed since the Christianization of the empire and where the ancient Greeks had worshipped planets and idols. In this temple were a thousand camel-loads of ancient books.⁸⁸ The primary merit of Byzantium, in the eyes of the Muslims, was its role in the transmission of ancient texts, and they were clearly impressed by the material that had been preserved by the Byzantines. This is indicated on a number of occasions. One such incident concerned a manuscript of the Greek text of Dioscorides's *Materia Medica*, which was sent to Cordoba as a gift from the Byzantine emperor in A.D. 948 or 949. The caliph asked the emperor, Constantine VII (r. A.D. 913–959), to send someone to help in its translation into Arabic. This translation was the starting point for a whole series of works that subsequently led Islamic Spain to become the center of pharmaceutical studies. Another incident concerns Muḥammad b. Sa'īd of Malaga, a humanist who collected fine books. Hearing of a famine in Byzantium, he engaged a freighter, had it loaded with grain, and instructed his agent to exchange the grain for books. His agent returned with a great number of valuable works, which were unattainable by his employers' colleagues.⁸⁹ It is also known that the vizier, poet, and ambassador Abū Naṣr al-Manāzī (d. 437/1045) frequently traveled to Constantinople, where he purchased a great number of books.⁹⁰

Beyond the record that they provide of Byzantium's tangible role in the transmission of knowledge, the Arab Muslim sources display a certain ambivalence concerning the knowledge and

wisdom of the *Rūm*—an ambivalence complicated by confusion over the terminology used in the Arabic-Islamic texts to refer to the ancient Greeks, the Romans, and the Byzantines. The discussion is, in any case, self-referential. The rhetoric that we find is intertwined with aspects of Muslim-Byzantine relations and—more important, perhaps—with internal intellectual and theological discussions and debates. It is thus difficult to reconcile various contradictory statements. Ultimately, we are left to conclude that this predominant ambivalence concerning Byzantine knowledge is, in itself, one of the main themes of the Byzantine image.

SHU'ŪBIYYA AND THE "DISCOVERY" OF PRE-ISLAMIC BYZANTIUM

I have thought about the question of Arabs and other nations. . . . The Byzantines, I find, are distinguished by their unity, the territorial extent of their kingdom, their many cities and great monuments. They have a religion that distinguishes the licit from the illicit and punishes the sinner.⁹¹

Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 329/940) includes this passage in his famous *adab* anthology *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, where he describes a journey undertaken by the pre-Islamic Arab king of Ḥīra, al-Nu'mān b. al-Mundhir, to the Persian court. There he found delegations from China, India, and Byzantium. When al-Nu'mān extolled the Arabs, the Persian king responded with the opinion quoted above.

The tale belongs to the period of intense *Shu'ūbiyya* polemic, a crisis that swelled in the late second/eighth and third/ninth centuries. This controversy, with its comparative cultural debates, was responsible for engendering a stark interest in pre-Islamic nations and cultures. The heritage and relevance of foreign cultures could no longer be ignored. Information had to be gathered on the historical origins, cultures, and national characteristics of foreign nations, both ancient and modern.⁹² Although the point of the classifications was to affirm the undeni-

able superiority of the Arabs over all others, one element that recurs is a focus on the four nations widely described as being civilized; namely, the Arabs, the Persians, the Byzantines, and the Indians.⁹³ Another source of interest in Byzantine history was the preoccupation of Islamic historiographers with the question of the relationship of the pre-Islamic era to the Islamic. Consequently, investigations into the histories of the great and ancient nations acquired a sense of urgency during the third/ninth century and beyond.⁹⁴

One prominent theme in many historical compilations is the history of pre-Islamic Iran, which represented an early topic of genuine interest. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, devotes ample space to the history of the pre-Islamic kings of Iran but very little to the history of Greek, Roman, and Byzantine rulers. R. Stephen Humphreys has counted three pages on the Roman emperors in al-Ṭabarī, five hundred pages on biblical figures, and two hundred pages on the Sassanian kings of Persia.⁹⁵ Although al-Ṭabarī was clearly interested by Persian history, there is another possible reason for his emphasis: al-Muṭahhar al-Maqdisī states that, in his day, scholars did not bother to record Indian, Byzantine, and Chinese history because accurate information was not available.⁹⁶ Despite the Abbasid-era focus on the discovery and assimilation of Persian history and heritage, in particular, a number of historians included a survey of Byzantium as well.

One structural similarity between these works is that their authors did not adopt an annalistic framework for the pre-Islamic era. Moreover, they viewed Islam as a radically new phase in world history, completely disconnected from the Byzantine and Sassanian past. This sharp disjunction between the pre-Islamic and Islamic past is reflected in differences in the kind of material introduced, as well as in its actual presentation.⁹⁷ This is apparent in the works of al-Mas'ūdī, whose presentation of the cultural account of earlier nations is incongruous with the Islamic part of his history that is dynastic or annalistic in form. This dis-

parity, which results partly from the confusing chronologies of ancient nations, was not peculiar to al-Mas'ūdī's histories.⁹⁸ The mission of Muḥammad opened a new age in which the history and development of the Islamic community was the only important theme and in which non-Muslim peoples, including the Byzantines, were no longer treated as having an autonomous history of their own.

The Muslim authors' knowledge of pre-Islamic Byzantium emanates partly from their reliance on Christian Arab sources, and various Muslim historians clearly acknowledge their debt to such historical works. This is particularly true in the case of al-Mas'ūdī, who alludes to a number of Christian histories that he consulted—most notably, the works of the two main Christian Arab historians of the fourth/tenth century, Sa'īd b. al-Baṭṭīq and Maḥbūb b. Qusṭanṭīn al-Manbijī.⁹⁹ Thus, al-Mas'ūdī's treatment of pre-Islamic Byzantine history, the most comprehensive account known to come from the pen of a Muslim author, relies considerably on Christian Arab historians. This factor explains the substantial amount of information and the wealth of detail that he includes concerning the history and affairs of the Byzantine empire. The implication is significant: these borrowings directly affected the type of information presented on Byzantium, the way in which it was understood, and the projection of its image in al-Mas'ūdī and other Islamic sources. Al-Mas'ūdī's borrowings are obvious in several instances but especially in his detailed account of the circumstances leading to the conversion of Emperor Constantine the Great to Christianity, as well as in his descriptions of the ecumenical councils.

Several Arab Muslim authors grasped the historical importance of the transfer of the Roman capital from Rome in the west to Constantinople in the east, as well as the Christianization of the empire, recognizing that both changes represented a turning point for the *Rūm*. They also associated the two events with Constantine the Great. Al-Mas'ūdī says that Constantine moved the capital from Rome and Nicomedia and built it on a

gulf in the locality of Byzantium, giving it his name.¹⁰⁰ Šā'id al-Andalusī, in his essay on the basic divisions between the nations, states:

Rome was the capital of the empire until 335 [sic], at which time Constantine, the son of Helena, adopted the religion of Christ, rejected that of the Sabeans and built on the Bosphorus a city bearing his name, Constantinople, a city situated at the center of the Greek world. This prince made this city his residence, and it remains until today the capital of the empire.¹⁰¹

The conversion of Constantine to Christianity has been reported in two different Christian versions. According to Eusebius, Constantine and his army saw a cross of light bearing the inscription "With this sign conquer" in the sky above the sun shortly before noon. That evening, Constantine had another vision in which Jesus commanded him to fashion a cross for protection against his enemies. The next morning, a standard of gold and precious stones was made: the Labarum. The version reported by Lactantius, however, states that on the night before the battle, Constantine had a dream in which he was directed to have the *caeleste signum dei* (celestial divine sign) inscribed on his soldiers' shields.¹⁰² In general, the Arab authors were aware of the Christian stories of Constantine's conversion. Al-Ya'qūbī states that the reason for Constantine's Christianization was that while he was fighting a war, "he saw in his dream that lances having crosses on them were descending from heaven. In the morning, Constantine carried crosses on his lances, fought, and was victorious."¹⁰³ Al-Mas'ūdī tells a similar tale:

And what the Christians say caused that [conversion] was the appearance of a glowing cross in the sky while he slept, during his war against the king of Burgān, and that he was told: "Be victorious by it over your enemy." And some say that he saw it when he was awake.¹⁰⁴

Al-Mas'ūdī also suggests a very different explanation for the conversion of Constantine. According to this story, Constantine suffered from leprosy and had to give up his office because it

was a principle of his pagan religion that a leper was unfit to rule and a duty of his cult to retire from high positions. As the Christians did not impose such limitations, Constantine maneuvered his way out of this dilemma by sending several army corps against the enemy, placing his men under the protection of the pagan gods and their cultic objects. But the troops were weak and returned defeated, inspiring contempt for the pagan idols and the degradation of their worshippers. Constantine was consequently able to switch to Christianity with relative ease and to remain in power.¹⁰⁵ This version implies that Constantine was never a sincere Christian and pretended to accept the new faith for his own political advantage.

Many Arab authors mention the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea convened by Constantine in A.D. 325 to condemn the Arian heresy. Al-Ya'qūbī goes further to evoke the Christological quarrels and the proceedings of the councils, even including the text of the Credo in his own history. For al-Ya'qūbī, the meeting of the 318 bishops and the four patriarchs of Alexandria, Rome, Antioch, and Constantinople was prompted by the fact that "Christianity held a place in Constantine's heart, and as he studied it, he found thirteen different doctrines."¹⁰⁶ In *Murūj al-dhahab*, al-Mas'ūdī states that Constantine traveled to Nicaea after his miraculous victory and asked the religious experts there to explain what had occurred. This led to the convocation of 318 bishops called together for the express purpose of explaining the Christian religion to the emperor.¹⁰⁷ Thus does al-Mas'ūdī transform the First Ecumenical Council into a preliminary meeting called immediately after Constantine's victory to acquaint him with the basic precepts of Christianity—principles that he may well have learned at his mother's knee. But in his later work, *al-Tanbih wa al-ishrāf*, al-Mas'ūdī is much better informed and does state that Arius was anathematized at the Council of Nicaea:

In the twentieth year of Constantine's reign, the first Synod met in the city of Nicaea. . . . 2,048 bishops attended with different opin-

ions and so 318 bishops of the same opinion were selected, and they anathematized Arius the Alexandrian. . . . They have forty books that contain the customary laws and traditions.¹⁰⁸

That al-Mas'ūdī has used, in this instance, information found in a Christian Arab text—Maḥbūb al-Manbijī's *Kitāb al-'unwān*—is obvious, particularly with respect to the figures quoted:

[Constantine] sent letters . . . to all parts of his kingdom . . . to all the bishops and patriarchs asking them to meet in Nicaea . . . so that they will not be divided. . . . 2,048 bishops came to Nicaea, . . . and 318 of them were like God's angels in piety. . . . They wrote down the true foundations of their religion and the proofs they had argued in forty books.¹⁰⁹

The figures 2,048, 318, and forty are identical in both texts. Al-Mas'ūdī also states that the meeting took place in the nineteenth year of the reign of Constantine, that the Nicaean Creed was then established, and that the bishops agreed to celebrate Easter on the first Sunday after the Jewish Easter, ensuring that the two feasts would never coincide. In addition, he mentions an important act of the Council: agreement on twenty canons that dealt primarily with questions of liturgical practice and problems of discipline and penitence.

Concerning the same meeting, Ḥamzah al-Iṣfahānī states that, in the nineteenth year of Constantine's rule, 312 bishops gathered in Nicaea to lay down the laws—the *shar'ī'a* of Christianity. He adds that all the Byzantines became Christians after this council.¹¹⁰ Thus, for al-Iṣfahānī, the conversion to Christianity of the population of the Byzantine empire was not a gradual process of transition but was instantaneous and en masse.

But Muslim polemic still crept into the record. Writing in the fifth/eleventh century, at a time when Byzantium had once again seized the initiative to pose a threat to Muslim lands, 'Abd al-Jabbār incorporates into his own work a negative tradition concerning Constantine and his conversion. According to 'Abd al-Jabbār, Constantine abolished idolatry, introduced belief in Christ, and himself worshipped Christ and the cross—but only

in public. Everything else remained the same, as Constantine left the religious practices of the Romans as he had found them. 'Abd al-Jabbār goes on to charge that the Nicaean Creed was imposed on Byzantium's subjects and that those who rejected it were killed: indeed, those who followed the true religion of Christ were persecuted and forced to venerate the cross, eat pork, and follow the religious practices of the Romans. 'Abd al-Jabbār's account belongs with the Muslim polemical literature that accuses the Christians of having deviated from true Christianity and of having corrupted the Christian scriptures (*tahrīf*). Indeed, the Qur'ān itself argues that Jewish and Christian scriptures have been tampered with (4:46) and condemns people who actually forge divine scriptures (2:79).

Religion aside, 'Abd al-Jabbār admired Constantine's rule and quotes the *Rūm* as saying that he had been a strong and energetic ruler, noting: "He holds among them a position similar to the one that Ardashīr, son of Babek, holds among the Persians."¹¹¹ Ardashīr founded the Sassanid dynasty in the third century A.D. and later Sassanian tradition, preserved mainly in the Arabic-Islamic sources, traces the beginning of all of the religious and state institutions of pre-Islamic Iran back to him. Because of this and because of the familiarity of Arab Muslim authors with Sassanian history, he thus serves as a natural point of reference for the Byzantine emperor. 'Abd al-Jabbār is not the only Arab author to draw a parallel between the two rulers: Al-Mas'ūdī states that his history of the Byzantine emperors begins with the reign of Constantine just as any study of the Persian kings must begin with Ardashīr.¹¹² 'Abd al-Jabbār also refers to Constantine's statesmanship, saying that the emperor was a cunning man who gave patient consideration to policy options and approached the rule of his subjects with the utmost gravity.¹¹³

Ibn Kathīr later reiterates earlier Muslim accusations against Constantine and the religious authorities who convened in Nicaea that charge them with introducing innovations and tampering with scripture. Echoing 'Abd al-Jabbār, Ibn Kathīr calls the First Ecumenical Council "the disdainful treason, for it was

there that the religion of Christ was changed," and as they added to it, they subtracted from it. It was then, he says, that the Christians came to direct their prayers toward the east and to make Sunday their sabbath; it was then that they came to worship the cross and allow the eating of pork. Ibn Kathīr adds that the Christians also adopted new feast days, such as the Feast of the Cross, the Epiphany, Palm Sunday, and the Resurrection.¹¹⁴

Arab-Muslim authors (most notably, al-Mas'ūdī) dwell on Constantine's conversion, Christological controversies, and ecumenical councils. Al-Mas'ūdī's pre-Islamic information on Byzantium closely resembles that of Maḥbūb al-Manbijī and Sa'īd b. Baṭrīq, two Christian historians whose information was circumscribed by their religious outlook in a process reflected in frequent references to events of significance in the history of the church. As far as the Arab Melkite authors were concerned, Byzantine history right up to the last quarter of the seventh century was little more than a historical background to the first six ecumenical councils, which led to the definition of the Melkite creed. Doctrine was a major reason for Arab Melkite historians to write history.¹¹⁵ The intersection between early Byzantine history and ecclesiastical history in the Christian Arab texts meant that Muslim discussion of either topic—early Byzantium or early Christological controversies—delted into the same material.

Shu'ūbiyya necessitated a fuller and more comprehensive assessment of the history of pre-Islamic nations. In the absence of information on Byzantium, Muslim authors had to rely on Christian Arab authors who had kept records of pivotal Christian developments in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries A.D. But while the Arabic-Islamic sources are replete with material concerning the early Byzantine period, there is an appreciable dearth in the quantity and quality of information concerning the internal affairs of the later history of the Byzantine empire. While the Arabic-Islamic sources provide considerable information pertaining to Arab-Byzantine relations in the era after the rise of Islam—describing raids, conquests, prisoner exchanges,

and embassies—they present few details pertaining to the internal developments of the Byzantine empire and church as such.

The decline in information on post-Islamic Byzantium may be explained in two ways. First, the external interests of Islamic historiography were generally limited to the prehistory of the Islamic community itself, including the history of earlier prophets and of pre-Islamic peoples, particularly the Persians and Romans. Combined with Judaeo-Christian biblical material, this information became the common stock of Muslim universal histories, receiving few later accretions. The second reason for the decline in post-Islamic information about the internal developments in Byzantium is connected to the fact that Melkite Christians living in the realm of Islam increasingly lost contact with events taking place in the capital. Indeed, after the rise of the Abbasids, the oriental patriarchates were cut off from effective communication with Constantinople, conducting their affairs without any knowledge of events in Byzantium.¹¹⁶ This explains why the Arab-Muslim sources are replete with the details of the first six ecumenical councils but report only scantily, if at all, on the major religious controversy of the second/eighth century—namely, iconoclasm. As Stephen Gero has shown, Christian Arabic and Syriac sources provide only meager information on Byzantine ecclesiastical affairs in the second/eighth century. The Melkite Maḥbūb al-Manbijī has only the following to say on Emperor Leo III's iconoclastic policy: "And then Leo ordered that the images of the martyrs be obliterated from the churches, the buildings, and the monasteries." Maḥbūb al-Manbijī does mention the iconoclastic council of Hiercia in A.D. 754, a high point in the history of the iconoclastic movement, but again, only a brief passage describes what was an intensely divisive issue in Byzantium.¹¹⁷ Gone are the long discussions that had earlier described doctrinal controversies and the details of ecumenical councils.

These points reveal that Islamic sources were not only acquainted with but actually depended on Christian Arabic sources for their treatment of pre-Islamic Byzantium. This de-

pendence colored the type of information selected for inclusion—most notably, the preponderance of reports on the affairs of the Christian church. For the later periods, the type of information on Byzantium that the Muslim authors acquired was different. Much less is said about ecclesiastical affairs, while attention is focused on aspects of Arab-Byzantine relations.

HOMO BYZANTINUS:

CRITICISM OF CHARACTER AND PRACTICE

Scattered anecdotes reveal the attitudes and judgments of the Arab Muslims toward Byzantine ethics, morality, and cultural characteristics. It is particularly interesting to examine those points that the Arab Muslim authors defined as strange and unfathomable and thereby show fundamental differences between the two worlds. When Arabs comment on Byzantine military abilities, for instance, the Arab Muslim texts commonly accuse the Byzantines of treachery, particularly with regard to their military victories. The Byzantines are seen as unfaithful, for they do not keep their promises; even their emperor does not take an oath of fidelity.¹¹⁸ One of the greatest betrayals occurred in 99/717, during Maslama's siege of Constantinople, when the patrician Leo broke his promise to the Muslim commander. This tale appears widely in the Arabic-Islamic sources.¹¹⁹ The Byzantines are also presented as strengthening their hand by dubious and deceitful means:

They acquire information on the affairs of the Muslim empire through their agents and spies. This allows them to discover the vulnerable points of the caliphate's territory and to penetrate to the interior of the country, its plains and mountains.¹²⁰

As noted elsewhere, al-Azdī claims that the inhabitants of Fihl preferred their Muslim conquerors over the Byzantines—even though the latter were Christians, as they were—because the Muslims kept their word, were more merciful, more just, and better governors. The Fatimid caliph, al-Mu'izz (341/953–365/

975), told a Byzantine ambassador who asked him to extend a truce: "As long as he [the Byzantine emperor] keeps the terms, we shall not open hostilities; we shall not act in a perfidious and treacherous manner, as is your custom."¹²¹

In a number of texts, however, the Byzantines are described as fierce and courageous warriors, an assessment corroborated by a fourth-/tenth-century Arabic proverb, which states that the *Rūm* will attack if not attacked first.¹²² It is reported that in the early period of Islamic expansion, the Muslim commander, 'Amr b. al-Ās, credited the Byzantine fighters with certain virtues: "They are the most persevering during adversity and strife, the quickest to recover from disaster, the quickest to return to the fray after apparent flight."¹²³ But while the Arabs knew, in the context of war, the importance of recognizing the qualities of their adversary, it should be noted that a notoriously fierce opponent also increases the stature of the victors—in this case, the Arab Muslims.

Various texts devoted passages to non-Arab peoples that tended to contain whole series of ethnic stereotypes. The Byzantines were, for instance, accused of miserliness. Al-Jāḥiẓ states that "the *Rūm* are miserly, less than the Slavs but more than the Persians." This miserliness is not attributed to a fear of poverty but to habit or an innate flaw in character. He goes as far as claiming that there is even no word in the Byzantine tongue to denote generosity.¹²⁴ To the Arabs such a defect was shameful, and such an accusation was shocking. Indeed, generosity was esteemed as a cardinal virtue in medieval Arabic culture, and al-Jāḥiẓ's *al-Bukhalā'* was written to demonstrate that the Arabs exceeded all other races in generosity.

Particularly horrifying, in Arab eyes, was the Byzantine custom of castrating children, especially those destined to be consecrated to the service of the church. Al-Jāḥiẓ writes: "The Byzantines are the originators of this custom, which contradicts the spirit of kindness and mercy." The *Rūm*, together with the *Ṣaḡāliba* [Slavs] are the only nations to practice castration, a most odious crime and a sign of their pitiless natures and cor-

rupt hearts. The Byzantines are accused of mutilating innocent and defenseless children and, still worse, of castrating their own children and selling them.¹²⁵ If they capture Muslims, they take the children and castrate many of the boys, a number of whom die as a result. They claim to have compassion and mercy, yet castration is not prescribed in canonical law or the Torah.¹²⁶ The eunuchs in the Muslim empire hold the Byzantines responsible for their mutilation, and this practice is offered as one reason why the Muslim eunuchs fight the Byzantines so fervently.¹²⁷

Each of the two empires had its own conception of social and familial life, and perhaps inevitably, the texts criticize Byzantine concepts of celibacy, marriage (including monogamy), and divorce. In Islam, the question of celibacy versus marriage is resolved largely in favor of the latter. The centrality of marriage in Islam is best captured by a tradition of the Prophet: "There shall be no monkery in Islam." The clear example of the Prophet established marriage and, more generally, legal sexual intercourse, as *sunna*, although celibacy did crop up at intervals, especially among the Sufis. Since marriage is so firmly regarded as the norm, it is not surprising that al-Jāhīz expresses amazement at the Christian ideal of continence and at the priests, monks, nuns, hermits, bishops, and archbishops who do not marry and do not have children.¹²⁸ From the perspective of the Muslims, one of the more peculiar features of the Byzantine institution of marriage was monogamy. Al-Jāhīz states that the Christians are all monogamous and cannot divorce or have concubines. Only in the case of adultery is the man allowed to divorce. Al-Jāhīz further reports that Byzantine women hate the religion of the prophets of Israel because it allows for divorce.¹²⁹

The Arab Muslim writers do not depict the Byzantines as individuals, neither in their physical appearance nor in their character. In general, the privilege of meeting men and women from the other camp was relatively rare. Thus, the knowledge that the authors of these texts have of the Byzantines is rarely personal and most often indirect. Consequently, *Homo Byzantinus* does not appear as a three-dimensional character, and whenever he is al-

lowed direct speech, he is expressing the thoughts, assumptions, and prejudices of the Arab Muslim narrator. The latter's object was to contrast Byzantine with Muslim behavior to affirm the superiority of the latter. As foils, the Byzantines are often given negative attributes and are depicted as behaving unnaturally and sometimes even perversely. Such preconceptions are seedbeds for the stereotypes by which differences are exaggerated. This is particularly the case in our texts' description of women and sexual relations. While the assessment of certain aspects of Byzantine culture is undertaken with great care, when it comes to gender relations, the discourse depends firmly on the concept of fixity in its construction of otherness. Fixity connotes rigidity and unchanging order, and the stereotype is its major discursive strategy.¹³⁰

BYZANTINE WOMEN: A SOURCE OF *FITNA*

The Byzantine woman is referred to in the sources as *rūmīyya*, the feminine form of *rūmī*. The Arabs knew Byzantine women mostly through the institution of concubinage; *rūmīyyāt* were among the many singing slave girls who filled Abbasid Baghdad. These concubines were destined for domestic occupations and the pleasure of their masters and brought with them the manners and customs of their countries, cultures, and religions, as well as stories of their homelands. There were manuals and epistles designed to assist merchants and connoisseurs in the purchase of these female slaves by listing the characteristics specific to women of different origins. For instance, a passage in the epistle of Ibn Buṭlān (d. 458/1066) states:

It is said that whoever wants a slave girl for pleasure should take in a Berber; if he wants her to tend precious things, he should take a Byzantine; for bearing children, a Persian; for nursing, a Frank; for hard work, a black; for war and courage, a Turk or a Slav.¹³¹

In time, certain conventional descriptions emerged to become common stereotypes. One quality that the Arab Muslims inevi-

tably assigned to the Byzantines was beauty. Šā'id al-Andalusī states that the king of *Rūm* is called the king of men because, among all human beings, his subjects have the most beautiful faces, the most well-proportioned physiques, and the most vigorous constitutions.¹³² This characteristic, beauty, is associated with Byzantine women in particular.

Byzantine women are described as being white-complexioned blondes, with straight hair and blue eyes. An unambiguous reference to the seductiveness of Byzantine women is contained in the biography of the Prophet—a reference that takes the attraction posed by Byzantine women as a given. During one of the incursions led by the Prophet Muḥammad, he asked Jadd b. Qays, of the Banū Salīma, whether he would like to fight the Byzantines. Jadd replied: "Will you allow me to stay behind so as not to be tempted, for everyone knows that I am deeply attracted to women, and I am afraid that if I see the Byzantine women, I shall not be able to control myself." It was likely in connection with this incident that the Qur'anic verse descended: "Some of them there are that say, 'Give me leave and do not tempt me.'"¹³³ The allure of Byzantine women is also stressed in the story of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, who took captive the daughter of the patrician charged with the fortress of Heraclea. She was beautiful and he loved her, building for her a fortress on the Euphrates that he called Heraclea to remind her of her own home in *bilād al-rūm*. Later, he had to send her home after Emperor Nicephorus I sent two of his most important patricians bearing gifts, perfumes, and a tent to request the girl's freedom.¹³⁴

The importance of women's physical appearance is reflected in these tales. These glowing reports of the beauty of Byzantine women tend to disparage the women of the subject culture—that is, the Arab Muslim women. The evident emphasis on the attraction of Byzantine women indirectly suggests that local beauty was less perfect. Yet the very presence of this beauty on the other side of the frontier—and, thus, at relatively close proximity—had the potential to threaten the harmony of the male-

centered universe. Indeed, the Prophet states in al-Bukhārī's traditions that there will be no "*fitna* more harmful to men than women." *Fitna*, meaning disorder and chaos, refers also to the beautiful femme fatale who makes men lose their self-control. *Fitna* is a key concept in defining the dangers that women and, more particularly, their bodies were capable of provoking in the mental universe of the Arab Muslims.¹³⁵ Women as a source of *fitna*—as a source of temptation—is a constant theme of the Arab literary tradition.

The danger posed by *fitna* proceeds from female sexual allure and promiscuity to the downfall of men and nations. This is exemplified by the story of the daughter of the Byzantine emperor, Julian (r. A.D. 361–363). The Persian king, Šābūr Dhū al-Aktāf (Shapur II, r. A.D. 310–379), was imprisoned in Julian's imperial palace, where the emperor's daughter met and fell in love with him, freeing him and endangering the empire as a consequence, for Persia was its foremost enemy.¹³⁶ The Byzantine princess actively collaborates in the enemy's cause, conspiring against her own father: she is dangerous to her own. The Arab authors also mention another emperor's daughter who captured the heart of the sixth-century A.D. Arab poet, Imru' al-Qays.¹³⁷ But indirectly, she was to cause his death, since her father, in anger, sent Imru' al-Qays the gift of a poisoned shirt. Thus, the disruptive role universally ascribed to women in relations between the sexes is reiterated in the context of Byzantine women and given a particularly perilous dimension as their behavior results in death or, even worse, in the defeat of a whole nation. Our sources show not Byzantine women but writers' images of these women, who served as symbols of the eternal female—constantly a potential threat, particularly due to blatant exaggerations of their sexual promiscuity.

In our texts, Byzantine women are strongly associated with sexual immorality; so much so that it is difficult to unearth historical evidence of their daily routines and individual achievements. Al-Jāhīz states that Byzantine women are not excised and this is why they are among "the most shameless women in the

whole world." Al-Jāhīz also draws a direct connection between chastity and excision. Byzantine women have sharper passions because they are not subjected to the procedure. The "uncircumcised woman," he writes, "finds pleasure, which the circumcised woman does not." Because they find sex more enjoyable, they are more prone to adultery. 'Abd al-Jabbār confirms this opinion, linking the failure to excise women with their sexual pleasure. However, he reports that married women are usually chaste; it is the unmarried who are adulteresses, and they often start fornicating while still living in their parents' home. He also mentions that Byzantine women are not veiled; even when married, they pass the people in the market with heads and faces uncovered, showing all their beauty.¹³⁸

These random references betray a strong inclination toward generalizations and stereotypes. In fact, in Byzantium, women were expected to be retiring, shy, modest, and devoted to their families and to religious observances. The upbringing of daughters took place in the gynaeceum, the part of the house reserved for women, in virtual seclusion. Outside of the gynaeceum, women had little contact with men and wore a veil, whether married or not. Although Byzantine historical sources show that strict conventions did not prevent illicit contact between the sexes,¹³⁹ the behavior of most women in Byzantium was a far cry from the depictions that appear in the Arabic sources.

Accusations of *zinā* (illegal intercourse) abound with respect to the Byzantines and are especially associated with the alleged sexual promiscuity of Byzantine women. 'Abd al-Jabbār states that adultery is commonplace in the cities and markets of Byzantium. If a woman has no husband, chooses not to marry, and prefers adultery, she is free to do to what she pleases. There are, he claims, many markets for prostitutes, who possess their own shops and sit in their doorways, uncovered and conspicuous. If one of them gives birth to a child, she can carry him to the patriarch, bishop, or priest and say: "I am giving this child so that he may become a servant of Christ." Inevitably, the response is that she is a "pure and blessed saint," accompanied by the promise

of her requital. More provocative is the claim that the nuns from convents went out to the fortresses to offer themselves to monks, "single men seeking God's face," receiving thanks for such deeds. In reality, there was an absolute separation of the sexes in monastic life, laws having been enunciated in the early conciliar legislation and reiterated in the middle Byzantine period.¹⁴⁰ Such anecdotes are clearly far from Byzantine reality and must be recognized for what they are: attempts to denigrate and defame a rival culture through their exaggeration of the laxity with which Byzantine culture dealt with its women.

Even married Byzantine women are described as being morally inferior to the Muslims. One anecdote concerns a Muslim prisoner who converted to Christianity and married a "well-to-do, beautiful Byzantine woman." He lived happily with her until, one day, he was sent on a forty-day expedition; while absent, he was informed that his wife had remarried. When he returned, he did not go home, and soon his mother-in-law came to see him with a large escort of her female neighbors, all wearing expensive clothes and jewelry. His mother-in-law informed him that his wife had not remarried because as a *rūmiyya* (a Byzantine), she could not have two husbands; she had simply taken a lover during his absence. The other women stood as witnesses to the fact that her lover was nothing more than that, for "this was not objectionable or shameful in their eyes." The mother-in-law urged him to return to her daughter, and he did. The conclusion of the narrator is: "All who enter *bilād al-rūm* lose their jealousy and passion and allow their wives to take lovers."¹⁴¹ This anecdote is clearly intended to discourage Muslim men from marrying Byzantine women, but whether such marriages were in vogue during this period is unknown. What we do know is that the absence of jealousy on the part of a cuckolded husband is a constant accusation leveled against Byzantine men, as well as the Slavs and other Europeans and, later, the Crusaders.¹⁴² The fact that this is a constant theme in the Arab Muslim sources may be due to the perceived greater frequency of contact between men and women in these foreign cultures, a circum-

stance felt to be less frequent in the urban environment of our authors.

The entire body of writing on Byzantine women seems to reflect Muslim fears of uncontrolled sexual activity. This threat was not unrealistic for although Islam officially tolerated marriage and concubinage alone, this did not prevent prostitution from prospering. Thus, in Baghdad, the Hanbalites, known for their intransigent rigidity, organized raids on houses of ill repute, while under the Buyid, 'Aḍud al-Dawla (d. 372/983), and the Fatimids in Egypt, prostitution was officially taxed. Similarly, in the Syrian port of Ladhīqiyya, the *muhtasib* taxed and posted an official price for the favors of each prostitute according to her age, charm, and beauty.¹⁴³ There was thus a real and constant fear of the degradation of Islamic mores that is represented, in our texts, by a fear of uncontrolled sexuality. The views presented of Byzantine women are indicators of a widespread internal concern.

The established rules of sexual morality in a given society are commonly subjected to friendly or hostile—but rarely impartial—evaluation, both within the society itself and within other societies that come into contact with it. In this connection, value judgments are even more suspect than they are with respect to other social phenomena.¹⁴⁴ The aforementioned accounts of Byzantine women seem to be projections of the perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and judgments of Arab Muslim men. They give an image of Byzantine women that is implicitly connected to the way in which they relate to the Byzantines and to their own self-definitions. Thus, there are no firsthand, credible, or dependable stories about Byzantine women in our sources.

An interest in women, especially the women of a foreign culture, may be associated with an eagerness to expose difference. Here, Byzantine women are presented as a collectivity, serving as a polemical focus for Arab Muslim belittlement of the other culture. While the one quality that our sources never deny is the beauty of Byzantine women, the image that they create in describing these women is anything but beautiful. Their depictions

are, occasionally, excessive, virtually caricatures, overwhelmingly negative. What we are left with is an ominous picture of what Muslim women would become if they were to exceed the bounds set for them by their Islamic culture. The image of Byzantine women presented by our sources justifies the control of sexual morality and, hence, of women's behavior by emphasizing that these measures are a prerequisite for stable social organization. Our authors dwell on incidents and themes in which the expectations, values, and norms of the two cultures clash. They reject the moral and ethical system of the Byzantines as inferior, reinforcing their own adherence to what they see as a superior moral system.

NOTES

1. Qudāma b. Ja'far, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden, 1889), 359.
2. Michael Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War: Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (New Haven, 1996), 85.
3. Alain Ducellier, "La Chrétienté orthodoxe face à l'Islam à l'époque des croisades: Poids du passé et conséquences à long terme," in *Itinéraire de cultures: De Toulouse à Tripoli* (Balamand, 1997), 47–69.
4. Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1:146–157; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, prima series, 2:743–744; Ḥamzah al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa al-anbiyā'*, ed. I. M. E. Gottwaldt (n.p., 1844), 69.
5. Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, 2:32–64.
6. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, prima series, 2:1874. The new culture's awareness is also illustrated in the fresco of the Umayyad Qusayr 'Amrah; see Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, 45–46. The Byzantines systematized a doctrine of the family of princes that reflected the political reality of the Middle Ages more faithfully than the empire-barbarian antithesis. The former referred only to heads of governments, no longer rating them as tyrants but conferring on them the titles of son and friend of the basileus. See André Grabar, "God and the Family of Princes Presided over by the Byzantine Emperor," *Harvard Slavic Studies* 2 (1954): 117–123; Speros Vryonis, "Byzantine Imperial Authority: Theory and Practice in the Eleventh

- Reflected in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Historical Sources," *Byzantion* 58 (1988): 361–393.
140. 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 1:167–168, 170–171; Dorothy Abrahamse, "Women's Monasticism in the Middle Byzantine Period: Problems and Prospects," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 9 (1983): 35–58.
141. 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, 1:221–222.
142. Ibn Munqidh, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usama ibn Munqidh*, trans. Philip Hitti (London, 1987), 164; André Miquel, "Les croisades vues par un musulman: L'Autobiographie d'Usama ibn Munqidh," *Revue des sciences morales et politiques* 14 (1986): 559–570.
143. Abdel Wahab Bouhdiba, *La sexualité en Islam* (Paris, 1969), 231; Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-khīṭaṭ* (Cairo, n.d.), 1:89; A. Mazaheri, *La vie quotidienne des musulmans au moyen âge, Xème au XIIIème siècle* (Paris, 1951), 64. The *muḥtasib* was the person entrusted with the supervision of markets and of moral behavior in a town.
144. Franz Rosenthal, "Sources for the Role of Sex in Medieval Muslim Society," in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam* (Malibu, 1979), 3–22.

Islam on the Defensive

CONSTANTINOPLE: THE CITY OF MARVELS

The Qur'anic concept of the Muslim as the community of the center—*ummantan waṣaṭan*—was inspired by the Greek geographical division of the world into seven climes. The majority of the lands of Islam occupied the fourth clime, the zone of prophecy, civilization, and culture. Geographical determinism brought home to Muslim scholars that they shared this central zone with both ancient and contemporaneous nations, including the Byzantines.¹

Arab Muslim geographical and travel literature extending from the third/ninth to the ninth/fifteenth centuries includes important material on the Byzantine empire and on Constantinople, in particular. The initial impulse to produce the first descriptive geographical works came from a need to become familiar with the great roads that linked together the provinces of the Abbasid empire. This knowledge was required for administrative, military, and religious purposes. The process of collecting itineraries and other geographical information led to the composition of a variety of different works on "the roads and the countries [*al-masālik wa al-mamālik*]." The geographers of the third/

ninth and fourth/tenth centuries give information about the frontiers of the empire and provide helpful lists of possible itineraries to reach it, as well as other lists organized along thematic lines.

André Miquel has elaborated, in his *Geographie humaine du monde musulman*, on the treatment of the Byzantine empire and its capital, Constantinople, in Arabic geographical works. He points out that Constantinople acquired a privileged place in descriptions of the Byzantine empire, becoming a major theme in the Arabic-Islamic literary tradition on the empire.² The treatment of the city provides us with the Arabic-Islamic perspective on this highly symbolic and significant space, a space fluctuating between the real and the imaginary.

Constantinople occupied a unique place in the Byzantine imagination. It symbolized the beginning of the East Roman Christian empire, yet was also the heir to Greco-Roman civilization. It was the heart of the empire's political, administrative, religious, cultural, and economic life and was famed for its architecture, its climate, and its geographical location. Seen as co-equal with Rome, it was celebrated in Byzantium as the New Rome, the Queen of Cities, and in a host of other epithets, maintaining its exceptional importance throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. In the eyes of both Byzantines and foreigners, Constantinople was an epitome of the eastern Roman empire, representing the entire complexity of the empire's power structures, social practices, religious norms, and artistic canons.³

When reading Arabic-Islamic medieval literature, it is impossible to avoid noticing the special mystique that Constantinople held for the Arab Muslims. The authors were practically unanimous in declaring that no other place in the world was comparable in size, in geographical location, and in importance.⁴ The third/ninth and fourth/tenth-century geographical manuals determined later perceptions of the Byzantine capital, since works from this period became points of reference for subsequent Arabic-Islamic writings on the city. In writing about Constantinople, Arab Muslims were not only reacting to the city's physi-

cal presence; they were also responding to its literary and historical associations. It is therefore crucial to recognize that the perception of space was shaped by subjective factors, for space is not only part of the material world but is part of the world of the imagination, as well. The texts and the discourses contained within them convey the unmistakable ambiguity and complexity that underlay the Arab Muslim attraction to, and understanding of, the Byzantine capital. This intricate image did not go unnoticed by contemporaries. For instance, the fourth-/tenth-century geographer, al-Muqaddasī, observed that controversy and fabrications about Constantinople abounded among Muslims, especially with respect to its size, buildings, and conditions.⁵

Constantinople had survived the successive attempts of Muslim armies to capture it. As the unattainable pearl, its luster was all the more alluring. Apocalyptic passages found their way into geographical manuals predicting the utter destruction and desolation of Constantinople before the last judgment. Ibn al-Faqīh includes such a passage that states that Constantinople became so arrogant and proud that it came to be called "the presumptuous":

Constantinople said: "If the throne of my father is in water, I was built on water." And so God promised her suffering before the last judgment and said: "By my power and majesty, I will remove your jewels and your silk, your wine and your bread, and will leave you with no song to sing. Your only inhabitants will be foxes and jackals. I will send you fire and leave you bald, and between you and the sky there will be only emptiness. Your voice will reach the clouds in the sky for, in your land, other gods have been worshipped."⁶

Knowledge of the Byzantine empire meant knowledge of the territory itself—its boundaries, countryside, and cities, as well as the routes and mountain passes leading to it. For Muslim geography, Constantinople is located at that place where the continent extends to Rome and the land of the Franks; to the east is the land of the Turks. It is surrounded by a canal to the east and

north; on the southern and western sides, it touches the land.⁷ Al-Mas'ūdī states that, when Emperor Constantine founded the city, he expanded the modest fortifications he found there and constructed many new buildings. On the western side, he surrounded the city with a wall that stretched from the Syrian Sea to the sea of the Khazars; the wall was aptly called the long wall, and its length extended to a four-day march. Most of the land between the center of Constantinople and the long wall consisted of lands and buildings belonging to the emperor and the patricians, including pasture lands for animals. The area around the city was cultivated. Al-Mas'ūdī expresses a deep appreciation of the strategic location of the site and explains that Emperor Constantine had to trick the King of Burgān, its original holder, to gain permission to build his empire's new capital there.⁸ The texts concentrate their attention on describing the city militarily, focusing on its fortifications and walls. Only twice in over a thousand years had the city ever fallen: the first time to the Latins, in A.D. 1204, and then later to the Ottomans, in A.D. 1453. But at the time when our authors were writing, Constantinople had never been captured.

The texts inform us of great churches, luxurious palaces, wonderful fountains, and numerous statues and talismans. In an effort to make this alien urban environment coherent, Muslim observers attempted to orient themselves by organizing the city spatially. However, they did not cover its totality; rather, the totality is represented by means of a number of fixed coordinates. This partly explains why the corpus of Arabic-Islamic literary writings on Constantinople are static, concentrating on a few unchanging monuments in spite of the profusion of churches, statues, and palaces in the city. Although the attractions of the capital were numerous, the Arabic sources focused their descriptions on a limited number of structures that came to be the defining landmarks of "their" Constantinople.

Perhaps the most extensive and informative description of the city by an Arab was made by Hārūn b. Yaḥyā and inserted in the early fourth-/tenth-century geographical work of Ibn Rusteh,

Kitāb al-a'lāq al-nafīsa. The date of the arrival of Hārūn to Constantinople is uncertain, but he is believed to have been there sometime during the late third/ninth to early fourth-/tenth century.⁹ Although a captive, Hārūn was left to wander in Constantinople contemplating buildings, monuments, and churches, examining the exterior of the Imperial Palace and some of its halls, analyzing statues and talismans with great interest, and witnessing or even taking part in imperial ceremonies. Despite the suggestion that Hārūn may have been a Christian, his description of the splendors of the Byzantine capital was accepted as genuine by the Muslims and was thus inserted into Ibn Rusteh's geographical work and quoted by later Muslim authors. As a result, Hārūn's descriptions constitute a primary text for assessing the symbolic importance that Constantinople attained in medieval Arab Muslim literature.

The Golden Gate

The Golden Gate was the official entrance of emperors returning from military expeditions. According to Hārūn's information, the emperor could pass through it only if he had achieved victory in a battle; at such times, he would head a ceremonial procession. He describes the Golden Gate as being decorated with five statues of elephants and one of a man holding the reins of an elephant. Other Arab Muslim travelers have also described this gate. Al-Mas'ūdī mentions a Golden Gate decorated with bronze slabs, while Ibn Khurradadbeh writes that it was used for the passage of armies on their way to war. Another gate that Hārūn mentions is the Iron Gate, also called the Gate of Pigas, through which the emperor passed when on a promenade.¹⁰

The Hippodrome

Hārūn describes the hippodrome stating that it resembles a *maydān*, a race course, and is used as a meeting place by the patricians, who can be observed by the emperor from his palace nearby. He describes it as being surrounded by hollow statues

made of yellow copper that represent people, horses, and wild beasts. He goes on to depict a chariot race, an event particularly popular among the inhabitants of the city. He says that to the west of the Golden Gate there are two doors through which eight horses and two golden chariots are led. Two men, dressed in clothes stitched with gold, ride on these chariots, passing through the gates three times. The entire population of Constantinople is present to see this spectacle and to see the victor awarded with a gold necklace and a *raṭl* of gold.¹¹ The races are at the center of his description. Hārūn, however, does not give any political or social significance to the races. The Byzantine factions of the Blues and the Greens were organized for political purposes and not merely for sports. Al-Muqaddasī, later on, traces the origin of the races to the divisions between Blue and Green, which he renders as the expression of a double opposition between the emperor and his minister on the one hand and the Byzantines and Muslims on the other. Al-Muqaddasī, hence, introduces the conflict between the Muslims and the Byzantines into the hippodrome and inscribes the ritual played out there in the contemporary reality of the Arab-Byzantine conflict.¹²

The Imperial Palace

The Imperial Palace was not a single building but an agglomeration of structures that included galleries, courtyards, gardens, broad expanses, and a private church. Hārūn describes the palace in the following terms: "The palace of the king is surrounded on all its sides by a wall that is one parasang in perimeter. A portion of the western wall is adjacent to the sea. The palace has three iron gates: one is called the Gate of the Hippodrome, the second is the Gate of Mankana, and the third is the Sea Gate." Entering the first gate, Hārūn found a large vestibule, measuring 100 by 50 feet; on each side were elevated seats, covered with brocade and strewn with tapestries and pillows, on which sat black Christian guards, holding golden shields and

lances in their hands. The Gate of Mankana led to an even larger hall, measuring 200 by 50 feet, which was paved with marble; in it were Khazars, who were also seated, holding bows. The Sea Gate opened onto a still larger vestibule measuring 300 by 50 feet. This hall was paved with red bricks, and on the covered seats sat Turks with bows and shields. At the end of the vestibule was a courtyard; beyond it was a curtain that hung over the gate leading to the palace's private rooms. Before the palace was a large courtyard paved with green marble and decorated with mosaics and frescoes. The treasury was to the right, with a statue of a horse mounted by a rider with ruby eyes. On the left, there was a large hall that contained three tables: one of wood, one of ivory, and one of gold.

Inside the great palace complex, Hārūn saw the emperors' church; of its ten doors, four were of gold and six of silver. In the loge reserved for the emperor, there was a seat inlaid with pearls and rubies, and four marble columns stood alongside the door leading to the altar. The altar was made of wood and was also encrusted with pearls and rubies, while the ceiling above was covered in gold and silver.¹³

Hārūn did not describe Hagia Sophia, which was Constantinople's main church and the seat of the Patriarch. He refers to it in one sentence as the great church meant for the population at large and mentions it as the final destination of the emperor's procession.¹⁴ The majority of later geographers and travelers describe Hagia Sophia more extensively, and it was to become the main symbolic structure of Constantinople up until the time of its conquest by the Ottomans, in A.D. 1453.

The Prisons

In the palace gallery behind the Gate of Mankana, Hārūn found the prisons. He mentions four prisons in this vestibule: one for the Muslims, another for the people of Ṭarsūs, a third for the general population, and a fourth for the chief of police. The geographer Ibn Ḥawqal, writing fifty years after Hārūn, also

mentions four prisons, in addition to the one in Dār al-Balāṭ (the Praetorium). He categorizes them as the prisons of the Thracians and of the Opsikion, in which the prisoners were not chained, and the prisons of Bukellarion and Numera, which were much more coercive. Al-Muqaddasī says that the prison where the Muslims were incarcerated was built at the request of Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik, the Umayyad prince who besieged Constantinople in 98–99/716–717, and that it was separated from the imperial palace of the emperor by a vast space.¹⁵

The Column of Justinian

Hārūn locates the equestrian statue of Justinian to the west of Hagia Sophia. It was built column on column and was surrounded by chains of silver. On top of the column, there was a square slab of marble on which there was a socle of marble. On this socle was a brazen horse, and on the horse the statue of Justinian, who had on his head a golden crown ornamented with pearls and rubies. The great emperor's right hand was raised as if he were saluting the people of Constantinople.¹⁶ The reference is to the famous column, known to the Byzantines as the Augusteon: the figure of the horseman looked eastward, and his hand was raised in that direction. In his other hand, the rider held a golden globe, or an apple, with a cross on top of it. According to the sixth century A.D. Byzantine historian Procopius, the presence of the orb in his hand indicated that all lands and seas were under his command, while the right hand extended toward the sun meant that the foreign peoples of the east were commanded to stay in their proper lands. The statue was a symbol of the power of this Christian emperor and a commemoration of the victories that he had achieved against the Persians. But in Hārūn's account, this original meaning is hardly found: Hārūn saw an invitation in the position of the emperor's right hand. However, not just anyone was being invited to Constantinople; the fact that the statue faced east, in the direction of

Islam, meant that the invitation was being extended to the Muslims.¹⁷

The Aqueduct and the Cistern

Hārūn mentions utilitarian edifices that occupied a place of importance in Byzantine architectural space. He refers to the aqueduct in Constantinople, which carried water from the land of the Bulgars. Once inside the city, the water was diverted in three directions: to the palace, to the prisons of the Muslims, and to the baths of the patricians and the rest of the population.¹⁸

Hārūn reduces the multiple underground water reserves to one. In the eastern courtyard of the emperor's church was a carved marble basin, which Hārūn describes in detail, as well as twelve columns, each surmounted by a different statue (falcon, sheep, bull, cock, lion, lioness, wolf, partridge, peacock, mare, elephant, and angel). Hārūn mentions a cistern from which water was drawn to flow from the statues atop the columns: on feast days, the cistern was filled with 10,000 jars of wine and 1,000 jars of white honey. On his way from the palace to the church, the emperor could see these statues and the liquid that poured from their mouths and ears into a basin, and all those accompanying him would drink from it.¹⁹

The Organ, the Horlogion, and the Talismans

Hārūn describes the church organ of Constantinople in some detail, placing the organ in the palace proper. Hārūn also describes the Horlogion, which was in a building southwest of Hagia Sophia. This clock had twenty-four small doors, each of which opened and closed by itself with the passing of every hour. Constantinople was famous for the ancient and early Byzantine statues lining the main streets and standing in public squares and marketplaces. Popular beliefs and legends had grown up around these antique monuments. Hārūn mentions one such talisman, created by the wise Apollonius of Tyana (first century A.D.), the

famous miracle worker of antiquity: "At the gate of the imperial palace, there is a talisman, three bronze horses made by Apollonius to prevent the [living] horses of the city from creating a disturbance or neighing at the door of the emperor."²⁰ Similarly, he saw four copper snakes—talismans to render snakes inoffensive. Near the Golden Gate, there was an archway in the middle of the *sūq* (the forum) in which were placed two statues that were talismans; captives were brought between these statues, and depending on whether they stayed put or moved, they were either imprisoned or killed.²¹

Monuments and statues popularly believed to possess talismanic or magical power were not unique to Constantinople. Indeed, the talismanic protection of antique cities is one of the themes of medieval Arabic-Islamic literature. Various authors, such as Ibn al-Faḳīh and al-Mas'ūdī, mention several talismans in relation to various ancient Near Eastern cities. Ibn al-Nadīm, when introducing a discussion on books of magic, writes that "one group of philosophers and servants of the stars assert that they have talismans based on [astronomical] observations." He goes on to give a biographical entry on one such man: Apollonius the Wise, "one of the people of Tyana, in the Byzantine territory" and "the first to speak of talismans."²² The Byzantines considered the philosopher Apollonius to be the sculptor of most of Constantinople's public statues and stelae depicting animals, and they attributed magical powers to them. The Byzantine collection of texts, known as the *Patria*, which enumerates all sorts of monuments in Constantinople, giving their myths and stories, proclaims Apollonius to be the creator of the city's talismans.²³ Apollonius's fame in this respect was so widespread that various Arabic-Islamic sources referred to him as *ṣāhib al-tilasmāt*, or master of talismans, and several Arabic works dealing with astrology, alchemy, and magic, among other similar subjects, have been falsely attributed to him.²⁴ It was the well-known connection between Apollonius the "Byzantine" and talismans that probably led Arab Muslim authors to be-

come convinced that the Byzantine capital contained an excessive number of talismans.²⁵

Hārūn's Selective Commentary

What Hārūn remembered was a handful of monuments. His memory was indeed selective. Hārūn mentioned some of the main axes around which city life gravitated, such as the palace and the Hippodrome. Conspicuous by their absence, however, are the people of Constantinople, the bustle of its streets, and the masters of its crafts. The texts failed to include the human experience, both individual and collective, contained in the city. No aspect of daily life is mentioned, and space is not conceived of as social—as a context for the relationships, episodes, or events of everyday life. Hārūn's perception of the city is partial, fragmentary, and mixed with other concerns of his own. At the same time, it should be said that Hārūn, or any other observer, could not capture Constantinople in its entirety; as with any other city, there was more than the eye could see, more than the ear could hear. As an observer with his own agenda, Hārūn selected, organized, and endowed what he saw with meaning. Like every medieval city, Constantinople had filthy side streets filled with a marginalized populace. But as the center of commerce in the early Middle Ages, the bulk of the city was occupied by the shops and houses of the merchant community. In addition, there were Byzantine manufacturers producing crafts, decorative objects, and luxury goods, such as silk brocades or enameled metal. Al-Muqaddasī mentions the markets, albeit briefly: "They are beautiful, the prices low, and the fruits numerous."²⁶ Again, the beauty and wealth of Constantinople are admired, but its people are ignored. References are made only in passing to the streets of the city, as in the story of the poet, al-Ṣalt al-Wābirī, who left for Byzantium after being punished for drinking wine; there, he converted to Christianity and married. In *Kitāb al-aghānī*, he is found wavering between his desire to go

back home and his love for his new family. A Muslim ambassador to Constantinople, who is passing through its streets on a mule, hears the sad voice of al-Ṣalt al-Wābirī reciting an Arabic verse concerning a locality close to Madina. Moved by the beauty of the voice and intrigued by the words, the ambassador traces the voice to the room of a house.²⁷ No more of the tale need be told here. The point is that this is a rare reference to the streets and houses of Constantinople. In the Arabic-Islamic descriptions, Constantinople seems empty of inhabitants; mention is made only of magical talismans and structures and objects that bring to mind the imperial presence—the walls, the palaces, the churches, the monuments, and the aqueduct. This wondrous city of marble, mosaics, gold, and precious stones was a powerful medium for manifestations of the imperial image. The travelers and writers did not experience Constantinople as a visual turmoil or chaotic disorder. In their descriptions, the city is harmonized, rationalized, and organized. Nothing untoward transpires: neither its cruelty (the cruelty of any giant urban agglomeration), its harshness, nor its violence.

Constantinople was subsumed by Hārūn, his contemporaries and later Arab Muslim authors, in a limited selection of structures. The recurrent references to these monuments as well as the constant repetition of the same descriptions signal their archetypal importance: they came to represent the city of the caesars, itself the symbol of an empire. This focus by Arab Muslim authors on the marvels of Constantinople rendered the slender knowledge of the city still more fragmentary.

Constantinople made a strong impact on Arab travelers and geographers. Constantinople seems to have provided a yardstick against which the Muslims might measure themselves and their own civilization. Indeed, several anecdotes make it obvious that some Muslims perceived Constantinople as the model city and that criticisms offered by the Byzantines were decisive in the construction and planning of Baghdad. In al-Baghdādī's *Tārīkh Baghdād*, it is said that Caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136–158/754–775) was inspired by the advice of an envoy of Emperor Constan-

tine V (r. A.D. 741–775) in laying out Baghdad's great commercial suburb of al-Karkh, which had not been included in his original plan. After the markets were placed on all sides in their arcades, al-Manṣūr took a Byzantine envoy on a stroll through the city and asked for his evaluation. The Byzantine ambassador said: "It is perfect except for one thing. . . . Your enemy can traverse it at any time, and your secrets can be disseminated in the provinces. . . . The markets are in the city, and they are open to everyone; the enemy can enter under the pretext of making commerce, and as for the merchants, they go to the provinces disclosing your secrets." It was then that al-Manṣūr ordered that the markets be moved to al-Karkh.²⁸ Another anecdote relates more extensively the Byzantine envoy's influence on the planning of the Abbasid capital. While al-Manṣūr was receiving a Byzantine envoy, he heard a great clamor that almost shook the palace. When he inquired as to the cause, he was told: "Prince of the Faithful, it is a cow that was about to be slaughtered; it discomfited the butcher and started wandering about in the markets." The Byzantine ambassador told al-Manṣūr: "Prince of the Faithful, you have constructed a city the like of which has never been built, but it has three defects: its remoteness from water, . . . the absence of gardens, and . . . your subjects remain close to you and when subjects are near their king, his secrets are disclosed." Al-Manṣūr answered: "As far as your statement about water, we have calculated the amount sufficient to moisten our lips; as for the second defect, we are not created for amusement and play; as for secrecy, I keep no secrets from my subjects." Later, however, the caliph recognized the truth in these observations and ordered that two canals be extended from the Tigris to the palace, that the 'Abāssiyya be planted and that the population be moved to al-Karkh.²⁹ A new capital is not merely a new city. Baghdad carried with it the prestige and authority of the Abbasid caliphate and symbolized its new universal orientation. These stories, found in al-Baghdādī, should perhaps not be given literal credence, but they do indicate that the Muslims were receptive to Byzantine influence in certain realms.

That the Muslims are said to have implemented the advice of the Byzantine envoy on such a vital question as the Abbasid capital is a testimony to the Muslim acknowledgment that the Byzantines were world experts in urban design.

Returning to Hārūn's description, one of its most astonishing characteristics is its lack of negative comments and criticism. However, Hārūn's impartiality, extraordinary at first sight, is but the natural outcome of the level of self-confidence that the Muslims had attained in their own civilization. Hārūn's description lacks any undertones urging the Muslims to imitate the splendor that he has witnessed. This was unnecessary now that Baghdad was firmly established—a Baghdad that was Constantinople's equal. Confirmation of this view is provided even earlier by al-Jāhiz, who reportedly said: "I have seen great cities that are highly reputed for their architecture and fortifications in the Syrian provinces and in *bilād al-Rūm* and in other countries. I have never seen a city which is higher in elevation, or more perfectly round, with broader gates, or more remarkable than al-Zawrā', which is the city of Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr."³⁰

CEREMONIAL, OR THE GRANDEUR OF BYZANTIUM

War was a routine occurrence during the period extending from the reign of Theophilus (A.D. 829–842) to that of Nicephorus Phocas (A.D. 963–969), but it was not omnipresent, having been gradually delegated to the troops and the population of the frontier. An equilibrium of sorts characterized relations between Byzantium and the caliphate for most of the third/ninth century. Until the time when the military offensives of the Byzantine reconquest managed to destroy this precarious equilibrium, the two capitals chose to watch one another from a distance through the rituals of their great embassies. By the early third/ninth century, direct links were developed between the Byzantine court and the Abbasid caliphs. For the next hundred years, contacts between the two courts became increasingly formal, as

each attempted to dazzle the other and show its strength by lavishly displaying their wealth and by limiting access to its ruler by means of an elaborate court ceremonial.³¹ The ceremonial of the Byzantine court and the extensive rituals surrounding the activities of the emperor did much to impress the imperial image on the minds of all peoples. The Byzantines praised the emperor as a symbol of imperial power, as an embodiment of the everlasting empire of the Rhomaioi. The ritual of the Byzantine imperial court was a powerful vehicle for imperial propaganda that aimed at the transformation of the emperor into a sacred being. In the words of Steven Runciman, "almost daily there was some splendid festival or ceremony in which the emperor played a chief part. This was designed mainly to surround him with a halo of glory turning him into the symbol of the Empire."³²

There are traces in the Arabic-Islamic texts of the way in which the spectacular propaganda of imperial ceremony captured the Arab imagination. Byzantine imperial dignity—distanced as it was by ritual, spectacle, a hierarchy of courtiers, rich court costumes, and beautiful objects made of precious metals and gems—was a far cry from the relatively simple ambience surrounding the leaders of the early Muslim community. While affected by such a powerful propaganda vehicle, the early community of believers seemingly made a virtue of its distance from elaborate ceremonial displays, behaving in a manner that was its complete opposite. One depiction of Byzantine splendor describes the visit of the Muslim commander Khālid b. al-Walīd (d. 21/642) to the Byzantine leader in Syria, Vahan. Vahan ordered that ten rows of Byzantine soldiers be marshaled to the left and right of Khālid. The soldiers' faces were masked with iron so that only their eyes could be seen. Vahan sat on a throne of gold. On his head was a golden crown ornate with precious stones, before him were spread carpets and *namāriq*,³³ and next to him stood Byzantine pages carrying in their hands poles of gold and silver. The Muslims understood the purpose intended by such a display: Vahan wanted to show Khālid the might and power of the Byzantines to frighten him and convince him to ac-

quiesce. Khālid, however, was said to have remained unimpressed; in his eyes, the *Rūm* were less than dogs.³⁴

The lavish Byzantine ceremonial and the wealth that it implied were derided by the Muslims, who accused the Byzantines of having amassed their riches at the expense of the poor. *Kitāb futūḥ al-shām* relates the tale of an encounter between Mu'ādh b. Jabal (d. 18/639), the messenger of the Muslim leader, Abū-'Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ (d. 19/639), and the Byzantine patricians. Mu'ādh found the latter reclining on luxurious cushions but refused to join them, saying he did not wish to walk on carpets and sit on *namāriq* that had been "withheld from the weak Byzantines." Instead, he chose to sit on the floor, neglecting "these vanities and worldly possessions." Thus did the Muslim emissary dismiss Byzantine wealth, upholding the lofty Muslim ideals of poverty, egalitarianism, and humility. By way of contrast, when a Byzantine messenger was later sent to Abū-'Ubayda, he was unable to distinguish the Muslim emir in the Arab camp. Abū-'Ubayda was anonymous, seated on the ground and dressed modestly, not as a commander.³⁵ This account contrasts the formality of Byzantine courtly life with the simplicity of the early Muslim leadership. Indeed, even during the subsequent period of Umayyad rule, life in the court had not yet been circumscribed by regular ceremonial procedures but still contained informal aspects.³⁶ Reflecting the mores and manners of the early Arab-Muslim tribesmen, the texts depict the Muslims as rejecting the worldly ways of the urban, sophisticated Byzantines.

In spite of such comments, which reflect their initial aversion toward Byzantine ceremonial, the Muslims quickly came to understand the value of ceremonial and, as their empire expanded, to imitate the splendor that they witnessed in Byzantine lands. Arab leaders realized the impact of such displays on their own subjects and said as much in early, explicit statements. The then governor of Syria, Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān, told Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–644), who had accused him of leading "a way of life like Chosroes," that it was vital for the Mus-

lim ruler to appear as similar as possible to his Christian opponent.³⁷ Ibn Khaldūn (d. 784/1382), much later on, reminds his readers that

They [the Muslims] wanted to avoid the coarseness of royal authority and do without royal customs. They also despised pomp, which has nothing whatever to do with the truth. The caliphate then came to be royal authority, and the Muslims learned to esteem the splendor and luxury of this world. Persian and Byzantine clients, subjects of the preceding dynasties, mixed with them and showed them their ways of ostentation and luxury.³⁸

Hārūn b. Yahyā provides a unique and detailed description of the elaborate ceremonial that he was made to witness during his captivity in Constantinople. More specifically, he describes the annual religious procession of the Byzantine emperor from the palace to the Great Church. This specific ceremonial had no parallel in static Abbasid caliphal ceremonials, which took place almost entirely in the palace.³⁹ Perhaps the novelty of what Hārūn saw in the Byzantine capital explains the great interest and attention to detail that characterizes his description.

Hārūn reports that the emperor had ordered that the route from the palace gate to the church gate be covered with mats, on which were strewn aromatic herbs and green leaves; walls to either side of the road were decorated with brocade. First in the procession were 10,000 men dressed in red brocade, their hair loose on their shoulders; behind them strode 10,000 young men dressed in white brocade. Next came 10,000 adolescents clad in green brocade, followed by 10,000 servants in blue brocade, who also carried gilded axes. Behind them were 5,000 middle-aged eunuchs dressed in white Khurasani *malḥam* and holding golden crosses. Following the eunuchs were 10,000 Turkish and Khazar youths garbed in cuirasses of lamella and holding lances and shields made entirely of gold. Next came one hundred great patricians dressed in colored brocade, holding golden censers, followed by twelve chief patricians, each carrying a golden scepter. The hundred adolescents walking behind them bore a golden

box, which contained the robe that the emperor donned for prayer. The emperor was dressed in his robe of feasts, a silk gown decorated with jewels; his crown was on his head and a pair of mismatched shoes, one black and one red, were on his feet. In his hand was a golden box containing dust. Immediately before him was the *ruhūm*, who silenced the people, and an old man bearing a basin and a golden ewer ornamented with pearls and rubies. The emperor was followed by his minister, who intoned the words "remember death" after every two steps, stopping to open the box, look at the dust, kiss it, and weep; this continued until he reached the church. When the emperor arrived at the church, he washed his hands, telling his minister: "I am innocent of the blood of the people." The Muslim prisoners were then brought to the church; at the sight of such magnificence and power, they shouted three times: "May God preserve the king for many years." Robes of honor were then bestowed on the Muslim prisoners.⁴⁰

Hārūn includes in his description elements common to the prescriptions found in the Byzantine *Book of Ceremonies*. He describes the movement from the profane, the palace, to the sacred, the church. He lays down the manner in which the procession advanced, on foot, and identifies participants according to rank, age, ethnic origin, and the like, describing their clearly regulated costumes.⁴¹ The theatricality of this public ritual ceremony with its costumes, staging, stylization of action, and sequential processional organization was intended to emphasize the qualities and functions of the emperor and the power of his empire above all else. This power was revealed by various means but especially through the ostentatious display of wealth. Indeed, judging by their descriptions of Byzantine ceremonial and imperial audiences, it seems that this aspect made the deepest impression on the Arab Muslim authors. In Hārūn's description of the emperor's procession to the Great Church, the words most frequently encountered are "gold" and "golden": "the hand axes were gilded . . . golden crosses . . . lances and shields made entirely of gold . . . golden censers . . . golden scepter . . .

golden box." Hārūn describes what seems to be an interminable supply of this precious metal, undoubtedly reinforcing the belief that Byzantine emperors were able to convert copper to gold through their knowledge of alchemy. That wealth reflected power is made clear in an early statement by Caliph al-Ma'mūn to his advisors: he instructed them to send a gift to the Byzantine emperor that was one hundred times more precious than the one he had received, thus proclaiming the power of Islam and God's favor to the Muslims. In A.D. 1045, Emperor Constantine IX Monomachus (r. A.D. 1042–1055) reportedly sent the Fatimid caliph, al-Mustanşir (r. 427–487/1036–1094), a gift so magnificent that it outshone anything sent by his predecessors.⁴² There are numerous similar exchanges recorded in the Arabic-Islamic sources.

In his descriptions of the imperial procession, Hārūn emphasizes the externals of Byzantine power: the pomp, the ostentation, and the huge number of participants in the ceremonial. The magnificent spectacle of many thousands of people walking in an elaborate, colorful procession led Hārūn to comment explicitly on its "great magnificence and power." The empire was evidently a state and a civilization of great importance. This impression was deliberately cultivated, as is clear in the introduction to the *Book of Ceremonies*, which stresses that the proper observance of court rituals makes imperial power seem more awe-inspiring, yet agreeable, to subjects, for it dazzled foreigners and subjects alike with the splendor and dignity of the Byzantine court.⁴³ Hārūn's description confirms the image of a powerful and unforgettable Byzantium, an image that survived in the writings of the Arab Muslim authors for centuries. The prestige of the Byzantine Empire achieved, in our sources, a certain timelessness.

The Byzantine imperial insignia in the ceremonies were primarily items of clothing: shoes, a golden scarf adorned with precious stones, a crown, and a golden cross. In addition, there were objects that preceded and followed the emperor, such as banners, lances, and shields. Ibn Khurradadbeh's list of the im-

perial insignia in the Byzantine ceremonial includes the throne of gold, crown, purple silk—described as “a kind of silk with a black twinkling”—and red shoes. He states that any person other than the emperor who wore the red shoes wrote his own death warrant; only the heir apparent wore a red shoe, along with a black shoe.⁴⁴ Ibn al-Faqīh reports that the Byzantine emperor dressed in purple clothes and that everything surrounding him was purple. Color was an important device of imperial propaganda. The Byzantines developed a sophisticated hierarchy of colors and to the top rung of this hierarchic ladder belonged purple and gold, two colors reserved solely for the use of the emperor. In Byzantine ceremonial, they symbolized, respectively, life and power, the sacred and the mighty.⁴⁵

The importance bestowed on precious textiles was an expression of hierarchy through costume, an instrument of the “politique de prestige” that was shared by the Sassanian and Byzantine traditions, as well as by the Muslims at a later date. In the Byzantine court, etiquette was indeed rigorous. The garb of the Byzantine emperor was strictly regulated, and his various robes were essential props of the Byzantine ceremonial. Clothing symbolized both rank and authority. The Arab Muslim authors knew of the different robes that the Byzantine emperors displayed during the various ceremonies: “When the emperor is traveling, he wears a precious robe ornamented with precious stones and pearls of all kinds. Each such robe is worth 200,000 dinars.” Abū al-Faḍl saw Emperor Michael dressed in this way during his travels and encampments and noticed that the emperor changed his garments frequently. “On the occasion of the Great Feast, the emperor’s robe was adorned with 3,000 seed pearls. . . . It was so heavy, it was difficult to lift.” Says Abū al-Faḍl: “The robe is priceless and unique on earth.”⁴⁶ The cash value of these prohibitively expensive robes was itself symbolic.

The same text refers to the various crowns that the emperor wore on different occasions: One is the “Largest Crown,” which was of gold and adorned with rubies and other precious stones. This crown was suspended over the emperor’s head when he sat

in his audience hall to receive his own subjects and foreign envoys. Another was the "Crested Crown," which is the one that he sets on his head on his return from a victorious campaign. It is studded with precious stones. As for the imperial throne, "it is made of gold and is ornamented with precious stones. The emperor's feet rest on a canopy of heavily embroidered brocade."⁴⁷

A contentious issue between the Muslims and the Byzantines was the ceremonial of proskynesis. Proskynesis became the rule in the Byzantine court: *The Book of Ceremonies* unequivocally states that each person has to prostrate himself or herself before the emperor, the only exception being the patriarch.⁴⁸ Initially, the Muslims regarded kissing the ground in front of a human being as blasphemy:

It was not the practice of old for an *amīr*, a *wazīr*, or a high dignitary to kiss the ground when he entered the presence of the caliph. But when he entered and saw the caliph, he would address him in the second person singular saying: Peace be upon you, O commander of the Faithful, and may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you.⁴⁹

The caliph sometimes offered his hand, covered with his sleeve, to his caller so that he might kiss it. According to Hilāl al-Šābī (d. 488/1056), this practice was later replaced by proskynesis "and to this rule all people comply":

In the past, the crown princes, judges, jurists, ascetics, and readers of the Qur'ān kissed neither the hand nor the ground. They merely saluted. . . . Now, however, they have joined the others in kissing the ground, except for a few who avoid this practice. Those of middle and low ranks, those below—the general public, and people without social status—are considered too low to partake in the honor of kissing the ground.⁵⁰

However, in the texts, we have accounts that show neither the Byzantines nor the Muslims practicing proskynesis in the context of their relations with each other. Al-Ghazāl, the ambassador of 'Abd-al-Raḥmān II (r. 206–238/822–852), refused to prostrate himself before Emperor Theophilus (r. A.D. 829–842),

excusing himself by saying that a Muslim prostrates himself only before the creator. The Byzantines, in response, resorted to subterfuge: they walled up part of the doorway to the reception hall so that al-Ghazāl would be forced to stoop in entering—his unwilling bow seen as the equivalent to the act of prostration. Realizing the trick, al-Ghazāl sat down, stretched out his legs and entered the imperial presence backwards.⁵¹ Hilāl al-Šābir also describes the Byzantine ambassador as standing before Caliph al-Muqtadir in 305/912 and not kissing the ground, explaining that the Muslims were excused from this practice in Byzantium. Al-Baghdādī quotes the Byzantine ambassador as telling al-Muqtadir: “Had I known that the caliph would ask me to kiss the carpet, I would have done it, for it is in conformity to our protocol—although it is never asked of your ambassador.”⁵² Thus, the Arabs rejected the ceremony of proskynesis in principle, and their ambassadors were apparently not asked to prostrate themselves and kiss the ground, since the Byzantines were aware of their revulsion for the practice.

Most Byzantine ceremonials mentioned in the sources occurred in the context of the receptions accorded to ambassadors. The historian al-Ṭabarī has preserved an account of Emperor Michael III's (r. A.D. 842–867) reception of the Muslim ambassador Naṣr b. al-Azhar:

The king was on a platform, and the patricians were standing around him. I saluted him and was seated at the edge of the great platform. I displayed the gifts before him. The emperor had an interpreter in front of him, a slave. . . . The emperor accepted my gifts and my offer of a reciprocal oath. The maternal uncle of the king, who was responsible for the affairs of the empire, took the oath instead of Michael. I said: “O King, I have received the oath of your uncle. Does this promise bind you?” He nodded with his head in the affirmative. I did not hear him speak a word from my first appearance in Byzantine territory until I left. Only the interpreter spoke, the emperor moving his head to signify yes or no. He never spoke.⁵³

The preceding description shows the Byzantine emperor surrounded by such reverential ceremonial that he is utterly inaccessible; thus was the ceremonial instrumental in increasing the air of authority that surrounded the imperial presence. As the Muslims developed their own court ceremonials, they vied with the Byzantines in constructing elaborate rituals for the reception of Byzantine envoys to Baghdad. On one such occasion, the ambassador was not allowed to meet Caliph al-Muqtadir until the caliph had finished decorating his palace. Hilāl al-Šābī' describes the pomp and ceremonial surrounding the occasion:

In honor of the envoy, the residence was furnished with beautiful trappings and decorated with splendid implements. The chamberlains and their lieutenants and the retinues, in accordance with their ranks, were all in proper formation at its gates, corridors, passageways, crossways, courtyards, and courts. The soldiers, of different ranks and in excellent attire, were drawn up in two lines and mounted on animals with saddles of gold and silver; and near them were the reserve horses in similar elegance, displaying many types of arms and equipment. They stretched from the upper Shammāsiyyah Gate to near the residence. Behind them stood the servants, the caliph's private servants and outdoor servants, in elegant uniform wearing swords and gilded belts. These reached as far back as the caliph's quarter. The markets, streets, roofs, and alleys of the eastern part of the city were filled with crowds of spectators. All overlooking rooms and shops were rented for large sums of money. In the Tigris, the boats were splendidly ornamented and fully equipped. The envoy and his procession walked until he reached the residence.⁵⁴

These proceedings, elaborately stage-managed, were widely reported by Arab Muslim authors including Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. Clearly, the Abbasid administration not only arranged a magnificent spectacle but also made certain that it was well publicized. Although such displays were designed to impress Byzantine envoys, they were also meant to

convince the Muslims—during a period of disarray—that the Abbasid caliphate was still a great power.⁵⁵

The Byzantine state had an impressive past in terms of power, wealth, and culture, and the Byzantines managed to enhance their image through their mastery of ceremonial. By also emphasizing the strength and prestige of the Byzantine empire, the Muslims were attempting to raise the authority and prominence of their own various states to the same lofty level as their worthy rivals. In this they succeeded, for Byzantium recognized Arab preeminence. In the protocols of Emperor Constantine VII, we find very cordial formulas for the reception of ambassadors from Baghdad and Cairo. At the imperial table, Byzantine ceremonial assigned Muslim "friends" to a higher place than Frankish "friends"; among the Muslims, those of the East were favored.⁵⁶ The Muslims readily grasped the meanings that the Byzantine ceremonials were designed to convey and, in their accounts of them, praised some aspects while condemning others. Yet without question, the totality of the Byzantine empire's image as rich and glorious had the intended impact on the Arabs, who admired the magnificence of Byzantine ceremonial in its fundamentals.

BYZANTINE REVIVAL: ISLAM ON THE DEFENSIVE

Whereas in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, the Byzantines had been on the defensive, with the Muslims launching ceaseless raids, the fourth/tenth century witnessed a Byzantine military revival and a reversal of circumstances. A turning point in the military relations between the two states occurred in A.D. 863, following the annihilation of the army of 'Umar, emir of Melitene, by the Byzantine army. This victory marked the beginning of the Byzantine advance in the east, and the disastrous news led to riots and to a clamor for volunteers for *jihād* against the infidels. From the year A.D. 900 onward, the Byzantines undertook a series of successful campaigns, and their changing fortunes are reflected in the tone of the correspondence between the

ruler of Egypt, Muḥammad b. Ṭughj al-Ikhshīd, and Emperor Romanus Lecapenus (r. A.D. 920–944). Ibn Ṭughj acknowledges the wise policies of Romanus, particularly the good treatment given to Muslim prisoners. He disputes, however, the emperor's claim that Byzantium was God-given and everlasting. To Romanus's request for improved communications and his expression of affection and love, al-Ikhshīd describes himself as willing to reciprocate in accordance with the dictates of politics and nobility "which we share, despite religious and ideological differences." As for trade, he grants permission for "the emperors' men to sell and buy as they chose."⁵⁷ By praising Romanus's policies, the letter indicates a tacit recognition of the new reality—namely, Byzantium's increasing strength.

As the Byzantines consolidated their position, the Muslims simultaneously suffered from internal weakness and division. In the A.D. 860s, the caliphate underwent a political crisis accompanied by economic decline. The situation first began to deteriorate seriously after the revolt of the Zanj, the mostly African slaves who labored in the reclaimed marshlands of southern Iraq. The revolt, which continued from A.D. 869 to 883, inflicted lasting damage on the Iraqi economy. In the A.D. 920s and 930s, the disintegration of the central authority of the Abbasid caliphate rapidly accelerated, and political life in the provinces became increasingly independent. Moreover, the prestige of the Abbasid regime suffered a disastrous blow at the hands of the Qarāmiṭa, who waged a devastating war in southern Iraq and sacked Mecca in A.D. 930, taking away with them the black stone of the Ka'ba. The successes of the Byzantine empire in the fourth/tenth century have to be viewed against this background of Muslim disunity and collapse.

Umayyad Spain and, later, the Fatimids both tried to establish diplomatic relations with Byzantium. The rivalries between the Abbasid empire and the newly founded Fatimid empire in North Africa colored, to a considerable extent, the bilateral relations of each of these competing Muslim states—one Sunni and the other Shī'ī—with Byzantium. For the Fatimids, the overthrow of

the Abbasids took precedence over holy war against the Byzantines. As a result, Fatimid policy toward Byzantium oscillated between a practical policy of *modus vivendi* and a propagandistic need to appear as the champions of *jihād*.⁵⁸ The Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz is reported to have replied to a Byzantine ambassador's offers of a perpetual truce as follows:

Religion and *sharī'a* do not permit a perpetual truce. . . . It is incumbent on your master, the king, holding the position that he does, to be aware of such an important point of law among those with whom he corresponds and to avoid asking for something that is inadmissible according to their law.⁵⁹

Although a perpetual truce was theoretically unacceptable, a limited truce was possible, and al-Mu'izz did conclude a five-year truce with the Byzantines.

The competition between the Fatimids and Abbasids was symbolized in the attempts of both to have the names of their respective caliphs mentioned in prayers at the Constantinople mosque. After a treaty concluded between Basil II (r. A.D. 976–1025) and the Fatimid caliph al-'Azīz (r. 365–386/975–996), prayers at the mosque were recited in the name of the Fatimid caliph; however, the Seljuk, Tughril Bey, subsequently requested by letter that the Abbasid caliph's *khutba* be read at the Constantinople mosque.⁶⁰ In the late Fatimid period, one clause of the treaty between Caliph al-Zāhir and Byzantium in 418/1207 called for Byzantine permission to repair the mosque in Constantinople and Byzantine recognition of the appointment of its muezzin.⁶¹ The symbolic and legitimizing power of this act in the Islamic world lost none of its significance when transposed to the Byzantine empire. In fact, the caliph's prestige was further enhanced by such international recognition.

Equally important, in this context, was the agreement that the Fatimid, al-Mu'izz, reached with Byzantium stipulating that Muslim prisoners captured in the eastern Islamic lands be handed over to the Fatimids.⁶² Like the reading of the *khutba* in Constantinople, this clause also had a purely propagandistic

value and reinforced the preeminence of a Fatimid Muslim ruler waging *jihād* against the infidel and freeing Muslim *mujāhidīn* in the process.

Relations between Umayyad Spain and Byzantium developed rapidly following the arrival of a Byzantine embassy offering a treaty of friendship between Emperor Theophilus and 'Abd al-Rahmān II. Among other issues discussed, the Byzantine ambassadors were quick to remind the *amīr* that the Abbasids in the east had usurped his patrimony. More important, the visit served as a public acknowledgment of Umayyad claims to rule not only Spain but the entire Islamic world and amounted to international acceptance of Umayyad legitimacy. Evidently, then, the Byzantines actively cultivated divisions and rivalries in the Muslim world.

The entire period of Byzantium's Macedonian dynasty (r. A.D. 867-1025) was a brilliant era in the political existence of the empire. It was now the turn of the Muslim lands to suffer repeated incursions, accompanied by looting and devastation. In A.D. 944, the Byzantines besieging Edessa were rewarded by the surrender of the "Mandylion," the holy towel said to bear an authentic likeness of Christ. From A.D. 946 onward, the energies of the Hamdanid ruler, Sayf al-Dawla, were devoted to the struggle with Byzantium. Initially confined to the region of Mar'ash-Hadath, the war soon spread to encompass the entire frontier.

The changed situation along the border is reflected in *Qaṣīda Sasāniyya*, a poem written in the second half of the fourth/tenth century and reproducing the vernacular of the Islamic underworld. The body of the work comprises a catalogue of the different categories of beggars and their activities. In *Qaṣīda Sasāniyya*, the term *makhṭara* is glossed as the skill that some beggars had at swallowing their tongues; the apparent disability that resulted was ascribed to the barbarity of the Byzantines, for the beggars would indicate that the latter had cut their tongues out. The *maisarānī* is "the one who asserts that he is a refugee from the Byzantine frontier zone and alleges that his tongue has

been cut out by the Greeks; he then calls armies to the frontier.” The term *maṣṭab* also occurs in the poem and is defined as “the wandering beggar whose pretext is to collect money to ransom his family left behind in Byzantine hands.”⁶³ We also encounter the Byzantines in the genre of the *Maqāmāt*. Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Iskandarī, the hero of the *Maqāmāt* of Badī‘ al-Zamān al-Hamadḥānī (d. 398/1008) sometimes poses as a refugee from the lands newly occupied by the Byzantines. These references clearly reflect a time when the Byzantines had taken the offensive, leading to an influx of Muslim refugees from the border regions.

During this period it was the Ḥamdānīd dynasty, established in Aleppo, that rose to the occasion, becoming famous for annual campaigns against the Byzantines. The Ḥamdānīd-Byzantine war inspired one of the greatest poets of the Arabic language, al-Mutanabbī, who was the inseparable companion of Sayf al-Dawla during his most successful period (337–345/948–956). The principal events of these wars found an echo in his poems, which have a significant topographic and historical—as well as literary—value. Particularly important are the verses that describe Arab Muslim attitudes toward the Byzantines, such as those that rejoice at the devastation of the Byzantine lands, the lamentations of the captives, and the humiliation of the vanquished.⁶⁴ Victory is celebrated—specifically, victory against this Christian enemy: “He has sojourned in the environs of Kharshana, to the misfortune of the Byzantines, their crosses, and their churches.”⁶⁵ In general, these verses depict the Byzantines as contemptible enemies, inevitably destined to be vanquished. They are cowards who are incapable of stopping the lions of Islam, and even when they are victorious, they still suffer more losses than their adversaries. They live in a continual state of fear and terror; their very ambassadors are so overcome with dread that they are unable to walk straight or take their eyes from the sword of the emir when they come to beg for a truce. Yet it is not a truce that they are requesting, but protection for themselves and their people.⁶⁶

The poet belittles the emperor and depicts him in humiliating circumstances. In the tent of Sayf al-Dawla, a wall hanging represents the Byzantine ruler, crown on his head, humiliating himself in front of the emir.⁶⁷ More particularly, al-Mutanabbī attacks the commander of the Byzantine army, Bardas Phocas. He depicts him as a craven figure, his complexion altered by fear; he is in continuous, ignoble retreat, abandoning virgins, patricians, villages, monks, and crosses to the emir. Wounded in the battle of Mar'ash, in 342/953, Bardas Phocas fled, leaving his son in the hands of Sayf al-Dawla. Asks al-Mutanabbī:

Do you think that by fleeing and abandoning your son to the lances of Khaṭṭ, you will now be able to inspire trust in a friend?

Consequent to these events, Bardas Phocas is represented consumed with terror, dressed in the garment of a monk and begging God's forgiveness and protection in a monastery.⁶⁸

However, the victories of Sayf al-Dawla were short-lived, and the emirate of Aleppo and other parts of the Islamic caliphate soon suffered the consequences of the Byzantine invasions. Byzantine success reached its height under Nicephorus Phocas (r. A.D. 963–969), John Tzimiskes (r. A.D. 969–976), and Basil II (r. A.D. 976–1025). In A.D. 961, Nicephorus Phocas took Chandax by storm. The following year, he plundered Aleppo although he did not keep it. In A.D. 965, the Byzantines triumphed on land and at sea: the army captured Ṭarsūs, while the fleet achieved the final conquest of Cyprus. In A.D. 969, both Antioch and Aleppo finally fell to his troops. Under a subsequent treaty, the emirate of Aleppo became a Byzantine protectorate. From A.D. 970 to 976, John Tzimiskes continued the offensive. The Byzantine armies entered Syria in full force and captured many cities—notably, Damascus, Tiberias, Nazareth, and Beirut. This southward extension of the Byzantine frontier in Syria now brought the empire into contact with the Fatimids. Between A.D. 976 and 1001, Basil II defended both his own conquests and the emirate of Aleppo against the Fatimid response. The latter part of his reign, as well as those of the last Macedonian emperors

(r. A.D. 1025–1056) were marked by small-scale operations in the east.⁶⁹

The balance of forces in the late fourth/tenth century placed the Muslims at a clear disadvantage, and the treaty of 359/969, which established the emirate of Aleppo as a Byzantine protectorate, may be taken as a symbol of their unprecedented weakness. The treaty authorized the submission of the emirate to the Byzantine empire, the payment of a yearly tribute, and the secession to the Byzantines of a portion of the emirate's territory. Other clauses stipulated that the emirate was duty-bound to give military support to the Byzantines and support the rights of local Christians, including such measures as the reconstruction of churches. The emir of Aleppo had thus become a vassal of Byzantium bound by political and military obligations.⁷⁰ Ibn Hawqal, who was writing in the late fourth/tenth century, paints a desolate picture of life on the Syrian frontier. He notes that Antioch was once the region's most agreeable city, after Damascus, but it found itself in a lamentable situation, after the Byzantine conquest. He also mentions the wide expanse of Syrian territory that had fallen into Byzantine hands: "They captured it by force of arms. A great number of the inhabitants have stayed, accepting to pay the *jizya*, and I believe that they will end by converting to Christianity."⁷¹ In the Arabic sources, this reversal of fortune was also paralleled by a clear change of tone in portrayals of Emperor Nicephorus Phocas.

THE RISE AND FALL OF NICEPHORUS PHOCAS

Ibn al-Athīr's *al-Kāmil fī al-tārikh* contains ample information on Nicephorus Phocas, tracing his origin, his ascent to power, and his murder. Since the capacities of men were often described in terms of *nasab* (genealogy), it is interesting to note that Ibn al-Athīr gives Muslim origins to the Byzantine emperor: "He was born to a Muslim man from Ṭarsūs known as Ibn al-Fuqās, who became Christian." After achieving the rank of Domesticus, Nicephorus killed the Byzantine king.⁷² Ibn al-ʿAdīm (d. 660/

1262) provides more details concerning Nicephorus' acquisition of power:

[Nicephorus] returned to Constantinople . . . to find that Romanos had died and was succeeded by his two boys, Basil and Constantine, with their mother, Theophano, as regent. On his arrival, Nicephorus was put in charge. . . . He then saw that wresting the kingship was the right thing to do and was more profoundly awe-inspiring; so he put on the red shoes, claiming the kingship for himself. He consulted with the patriarch, who advised him to marry Theophano, the mother of the two boys, and to be her partner in the kingship. They agreed on that, and they crowned him.⁷³

The Ḥamdānīd poet Abu Firās mentions Nicephorus Phocas in one of his poems, in the context of an imagined discussion between the imprisoned poet and the emperor concerning the respective merits of the Arabs and Byzantines. The poem starts with the following words: "You claim, O ox with thick dewlaps. . . ." ⁷⁴ Several descriptions of the physical appearance of this particular emperor originating from the pens of Byzantine authors still exist as well as these words, written by the Latin envoy, Liutprand of Cremona: "[He is] a monstrosity of a man, dwarf, fat-headed with tiny mole's eyes; disfigured by a short, broad, thick beard going gray; disgraced by a neck scarcely an inch long." ⁷⁵ *ʿIlj* is the term with which the poet Abū Firās used with reference to Nicephorus Phocas: "One of the most astonishing things is an *ʿilj* explaining to me the admissible and the forbidden." ⁷⁶

Ibn al-Athīr focuses on Nicephorus Phocas's aggressive eastern policy that had led him to conquer fortresses, towns, and cities:

Nicephorus was unyielding with the Muslims. He is the one who conquered Aleppo during the rule of Sayf al-Dawla, his stature increasing among his people. He is also the one who conquered Ṭarsūs, Maṣṣīṣa, Aḍana. . . . He concentrated his efforts on conquering the lands of Islam, which he achieved because of internal

feuding among the Muslim kings. . . . The Muslims feared him greatly.⁷⁷

Ibn al-'Adīm similarly states that "Naqfūr b. al-Fūqās, the domesticus, subjugated *bilād al-Islām* and wrested from the Muslims a number of cities and fortresses."⁷⁸ In a sermon, the preacher, Ibn Nubāta (d. 374/984–985), exhorted the faithful to resist the Byzantines by referring to the success of Nicephorus Phocas who had subdued states, conquered lands, brought destruction, and surpassed all limits in his injustice and his impertinence.⁷⁹ In connection with the conquest of Ṭarsūs, Nicephorus is said to have

entered Ṭarsūs, climbed its pulpit and asked those around him: "Where am I?" They said: "In the pulpit of Ṭarsūs." He answered: "No, I am [already] in the pulpit of Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem). This city was preventing me from that one."⁸⁰

The geographer Yāqūt reports that, when Nicephorus conquered Ṭarsūs, he erected two standards outside it and ordered his herald to proclaim:

Those who wish to live in the territory of the merciful, equitable, and just king, those who desire security of property, of their lives, and the lives of their families and children, those who wish the thoroughfares to be kept safe and who desire just laws and fair treatment . . . let them come under this banner and return with the king to the land of the *Rūm*. But those who want fornication, tyrannical laws and practices, extortion, [and the] confiscation of property . . . let them rally beneath the other flag and go to the land of Islam.

The conquest of Ṭarsūs was peaceful. Any Muslim man who wished to leave was permitted to take away with him whichever of his possessions he could carry; in return, all of the mosques were destroyed. Yāqūt tells of heart-breaking scenes in which Muslims wept while bidding their children farewell.⁸¹ Ṭarsūs received its share of *faḍā'il* in a literature that expounded its virtues and features. Al-Ṭarsūsī's *Siyar al-thughūr* contains pro-

phetic traditions that laud the virtues of *ghāzī* life and describes the heavenly rewards awaiting those who fulfilled the duty of *jihād*:

[The Prophet of God] replied: A group from amongst my community who will reside in a town which will be built beyond the Sayhān and Jayhān [rivers]; whoever has a life-span extending to that time, let him take his share [of life] in it, for indeed, a martyr from amongst that group of people will be equal in merit to the martyrs of Badr. By Him in Whose hand is my soul, God will certainly raise up from that town on the Resurrection Day 170,000 martyrs who will enter Paradise without having to undergo the testing process of the enumeration of virtues and vices. . . . God will be more tender towards that town than a mother towards her child. God will grant forgiveness to the people of that town every day at sunrise and sunset alike. They will continue to enjoy the state of righteousness, and it will stay permanently with them, until at the end of time, a group of them will combat the Antichrist [*al-dajjāl*]. . . . The town's name is Ṭarsūs.⁸²

Ṭarsūs's fighters were promised heavenly rewards and were likened to the first martyrs in Islam, the martyrs of Badr. This comparison is used in the passage to underline their crucial role as defenders of Islam, for Ṭarsūs was "the place where the exalted Book of God used to be recited . . . the place from which expeditions into Byzantium were launched."⁸³ But in spite of the eschatological role that was given to Ṭarsūs in the final struggle against the Antichrist, the city fell to Nicephorus Phocas and was to remain in Christian hands until the Mamlūk sultan Qalāwūn (678–689/1280–1290) conquered it in A.D. 1275.

As is already obvious, the Arab Muslim texts depict Nicephorus Phocas in uniformly negative terms. The background to this image is clear: Nicephorus Phocas was responsible for a series of actions and events that exploited the political disarray of the Islamic empire to reveal, in unmistakable terms, the reversal of the two rivals' respective positions.

The geographer Ibn Ḥawqal, a contemporary of Nicephorus Phocas, mentions Byzantine opposition to the emperor and

ascribes Byzantine complaints to his financial exactions. Nicephorus Phocas demanded ten golden dinars from every household that possessed servants, cows, sheep, and agricultural and pasture land. From the less wealthy, he demanded the services of one fully equipped soldier, in addition to a sum of money. According to Ibn Ḥawqal, the campaigns of Nicephorus Phocas were financed entirely from exactions, for he never drew on the funds of his own treasury, fortune, or revenues. It was his method of gathering money that made the Christians hate him and loathe his rule; in the end, this was the cause of his murder.⁸⁴ This particular passage of Ibn Ḥawqal's work contains examples of injustice and oppression, probably the only way in which a Muslim writer could undermine the immense military success of Nicephorus Phocas. Ibn al-Athīr relates the circumstances leading eventually to the assassination of the Byzantine emperor. Having married the wife of the emperor whom he had murdered, Nicephorus was resolved to castrate his predecessor's sons. Learning of his intentions, his wife—and their mother—resorted to a stratagem to have him killed. She asked about the Domesticus (commander of the military guards) and agreed with him that he should visit her, in woman's dress, together with others on the night that Nicephorus's murder was to take place. She told her husband that some female relatives were visiting her, and she put them up in quarters connected to the imperial apartments. On Christmas Eve, while Nicephorus was in a deep sleep, his wife opened the door to the assassins, and they entered and killed him. Ibn al-Athīr adds that it was said that Nicephorus never slept without a weapon except for that one night because of God's wish that he be killed.⁸⁵ On hearing of his assassination, Ibn Nubāta, preacher at the court of Sayf al-Dawla, pronounced a sermon in which he alluded to the emperor's death: "See what God has done to the Tyrant of the Rūm. . . . God was kind to you and arranged it so that his murder occurred in his own land; we do not deserve such kindness from God."⁸⁶

Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya al-kubra by Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī has preserved an Arabic poem, full of mockery and defiance, that Nicephorus Phocas is supposed to have sent to Caliph al-Muṭī' (r. 334–363/946–974). In it, Nicephorus portrays himself as the champion of Christianity, boasts of his conquests, and threatens to march against Baghdad, Egypt, and Jerusalem. He insults the Muslims, in the person of their prophet, and says that his next campaign will be against Mecca to establish the throne of Christ: "From the pure and Christian king to the one assuming the burdens of power of the family of Hāshim: Have you not heard of my activities? Yes, but you are unable to act in an enterprising manner. . . . Nothing is left in your *thughūr* except ashes." Nicephorus then mentions his capture of the Armenian *thughūr* and his invasion of the Mesopotamian *thughūr*. Hādath, Mar'ash, Edessa, and Ṭarsūs up until Aleppo have all been taken, their women taken captive, and their walls destroyed. Nicephorus then promises the conquest of Antioch and Damascus, with which he claims a special relationship: "And the dwelling of my ancestors was Damascus, and its possession will revert under my seal." He asks the Arabs to return to Ṣan'ā' and al-Tahā'im: "Dwellers of the sands, woe unto you, go back to your land of Ṣan'ā' and al-Tahā'im." Egypt, too, will be his, and he even threatens the people of Baghdad:

You accepted the Daylamī to be your caliph,
and thus you became slaves of the Daylam slaves.
Return humiliated to the land of the Ḥijāz,
and leave *Bilād al-Rūm* to the magnanimous men.
For I will lead my army to Baghdad
and burn it from above, destroy its walls, and take its children
captive.
From there I will go to Shīrāz and Rayy,
so inform Khurāsān of my intentions.

Mecca will be his for all eternity, and he will strike out to the south to conquer Yaman and to the north to reach Jerusalem:

"I will conquer east and west and propagate everywhere the religion of the cross."⁸⁷

The poem attributed to Nicephorus is full of threats, all of them made with one aim in mind: his stated intention to propagate Christianity. Such a "crusading" mentality was foreign to the Byzantines, although in his *Taktika*, Emperor Leo VI (r. A.D. 886–912) had suggested that the mobilizing ideology of *jihād* was one of the main reasons for Muslim military success and that the tactic might be successfully adopted by the Byzantines together with other elements from the Muslim model. Nicephorus Phocas certainly understood how the promise of a celestial reward could motivate combatants and tried, in vain, to make the church adopt a doctrine similar to Muslim martyrdom. He asked the Greek clergy to honor as martyrs all Christian soldiers who died fighting the Muslims, but Patriarch Polyeuktos opposed the demand.⁸⁸

The arrogance of Nicephorus's threat against the Islamic territories seems to have provoked a reaction in Baghdad since this episode is mentioned in several Arabic-Islamic sources. Indeed, the poem is more than a tribute to the Byzantine emperor's confidence and ambition; it is also a propaganda device in the psychological war between the two rivals.⁸⁹ The effectiveness of this scheme is undeniable: the Muslims were incensed because the "evil one" used it as a platform to insult and denigrate them and to issue menacing threats. The poem insulted the Muslims by denying their cultural achievements and reminding them of their simple Bedouin origins. A response to it was written by Shaykh Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl, one of the foremost masters of Islamic law.⁹⁰

I have received the declarations of a man
who is ignorant of the ways of disputation,
who has fabricated titles and enumerated achievements
that leave no trace, except in his imagination.

The cruelty of the Byzantines in times of war and their overall lack of compassion is emphasized in this poem as being unchar-

acteristic of Christianity. Specifically, Nicephorus is accused of persecuting Muslims in the conquered territories:

He calls himself the pure one,
while he is the most immoral polytheist.

And he claims to be Christian, while he is most cruel and merciless.

A pure Christian king is not perfidious, arrogant, and oppressive.

Al-Qaffāl argues that Nicephorus Phocas's pride is totally misplaced, since the victories that he claims as his own are actually the accomplishments of his predecessors. Moreover, these military victories are the result of pure treachery, in contrast to those won by the Muslims. As well, it must be remembered that the current Byzantine triumphs had been preceded by centuries of Byzantine defeat:

You enumerate days long past and victories won by your predecessors;

. . . You did not conquer Ṭarsūs through war, . . .

and you killed the inhabitants of Maṣṣīṣa through treachery.

. . . This, in religion, is a great sin.

Have we not defeated you and your country in battles
that are recounted in legends?

For three hundred consecutive years

we have been breaking your domination with axes.

And did we not conquer the lands east and west?

Only the fool forgets these conquests.

A man's worst day is the day madness descends on him,

O madman in the vilest sleep!

. . . We had captured from you all that you have now captured,
but with the sword, not with perfidy.

We expelled you to your land of Rūm, and you fled from *al-Shām*
like an ostrich.

Were it not for the commandments of the Prophet,

Flight would have been impermissible, even on your knees.

Yea, you are the defeated ones,

even though you have reconquered the frontier lands due to our
ruler's negligence.

We are generous in our victory,
While, in your victory, you are the epitome of evil.

Surprisingly, al-Qaffāl largely accepted Byzantine accusations about the Muslim leadership, rather than refuting them:

You say that you have defeated us because our judges are corrupt
and because they sell their verdicts for a few *dirhams*.
This confirms the truthfulness of our religion,
for when we are oppressors, we are, in our turn, oppressed.
You enumerate lands that you wish to conquer,
but these aspirations are only the longings of a dreamer.
Whosoever resolves to conquer east and west
so as to disseminate the religion of the cross has the worst design.
. . . If Baghdad has been enslaved by its Daylami slaves, truth has
its own partisans.
Who will carry my advice to Nicephorus before he regrets it?
The armies of Khurāsān will come to fight, . . .
and the sword will judge between us.
We hope that with the help of God, we will conquer,
and we will reach Constantinople. . . .
Then Nicephorus will become the slave.
. . . We will laugh, and he will repent.

Once again, the conquest of Constantinople comes to the fore, as do accusations of Byzantine perfidy and cowardliness and the emperor's arrogance. Most problematic to the Arab Muslim writers on both the historical and theological levels was the overwhelming success of their Byzantine rival. Introspection was needed to understand or explain away Byzantine triumphs, and the poem's explicit criticism of the Muslim ruling class provided a scapegoat. Thus, the weakness of Muslim defenses is presented as a consequence of the oppression and negligence of Muslim rulers and the corruption of judges—all upholders of Islamic law and justice. Al-Qaffāl, who was a Shafiite jurist, confirms the emperor's verse attacking the Shī'ī Buyids—by then the actual rulers of Baghdad—as Daylam slaves. The Buyids' accession to power had compounded earlier interconfessional tensions, with the Buyid emir, Mu'izz al-Dawla, sanctioning

some Shī'ī practices, such as the commemoration of 'Ashūrā', first publicly celebrated on 10 Muḥarram 352/963. Under the Buyids, the Shī'a were openly allowed to follow their own interpretation of Islam, and the consequent religious friction with Sunni Muslims led to serious conflict. Indeed, the Buyid period was characterized by a state of continuous urban crisis in the capital, Baghdad, indicated by frequent popular disturbances and brigandage. The lack of security, due to government inaction, had economic consequences, as well; the state thus suffered further decline. Sabuktakin, the Turkish leader in the capital, diverted Baghdadi enthusiasm for *jihād* against the Byzantines into attacks on the Buyids and their local and Daylamite supporters on the grounds of heresy. In this historical context, al-Qaffāl's point is clear: Byzantine victories were attributable to Islamic weakness and division rather than to Byzantine power.

Ibn Ḥawqal offers a similar argument in explaining the decline of the Cilician city of Ṭarsūs, whose "inhabitants have perished and their wealth departed so that it is as if . . . [they] had never been." Ibn Ḥawqal emphasizes that the cause of such disasters does not lie in the power and wealth of the infidel Byzantine empire for "in reality, its position is precarious, its power insignificant, its revenues small, its population poor, its wealth scarce, its finances disorganized, and its resources minimal." He argues that Byzantine victories are solely the product of disunity in the Islamic world, its lack of organization, and the endless revolts, rebellions, and civil wars that pitted Muslim against Muslim. This "left the field open to the Byzantines and allowed them to seize what was previously closed to them and to have ambitions that until recently would have been unthinkable."⁹¹

Hence, in addition to textual traditions, regional developments, both internal and external, contributed to the evolution of negative Arab Muslim traditions of Byzantium and its rulers in the second half of the fourth/tenth century. During this period, Nicephorus Phocas annexed Cilicia and a large part of Syria

as part of an overt program to "propagate the religion of the cross." Nicephorus Phocas was, perhaps, the only emperor to try to transform the Byzantine wars against the Arabs into a holy war. As a result, his image was bound to vary in different times and different circumstances, particularly when Islam was clearly on the defensive.

END OF AN ERA: THE BATTLE OF MANZIKERT AND THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

Despite a brilliant revival of power and wealth in the fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries, the Byzantine state began to disintegrate by century's end, a process accelerated by internal difficulties and the appearance of the Turks in the Near East and culminating in the crushing Byzantine defeat at Manzikert in 463/1071. This battle was one of the most spectacular events in the history of the relations between Byzantium and the Islamic world as it marked the collapse of Byzantium as a great political power and the beginning of the Turkification of Asia Minor. Having analyzed the Arabic sources that mention this battle, Speros Vryonis points out that the importance of these texts lies in the fact that they mark the beginning of the transformation of the history of the battle into the poetic domain of heroic legend and sensationalism.⁹² Arab Muslim authors wrote long after the event, and their narratives were disjointed and brief. The one exception is the detailed and accurate account of the captivity of the Byzantine emperor Romanus IV Diogenes (r. A.D. 1068–1071):

When the sun became yellow the dust of the battlefield cleared, and there embraced the emperor of the *Rûm* the hand of captivity and disaster and the manner was thus. A horse belonging to someone of the *gulams* of the sultan strayed, and this *gulam* followed the track of his horse and found a horse with an ornamented bridle and a saddle of gold, and a man seated by the horse with a helmet of gold in his presence and armor inlaid with gold. The *gulam* started to slay him, but the man said to him:

"I am caesar of the *Rûm*. Do not kill me for the slaying of kings is an ill omen." . . . The *gulam* . . . led him to the sultan's camp. . . . They made him enter in the presence of the sultan, and the chamberlain seized him by the hair and chest and threw him down to the ground so that he should kiss it, but he did not kiss it in the presence of the sultan because he was carried away by the pride of kingship and its splendor. And the sultan said: "Leave him alone." . . . When the emperor of the *Rûm* was brought before the couch of the sultan, the emperor of *Rûm* said to the interpreter: "Tell the sultan to return me to the capital of my kingdom before the *Rûm* agree on another emperor and he openly declares battle and war. . . . I shall be more obedient to you than your slaves, and each year I shall deposit with you, by way of *gizya*, 1,000,000 dinars." The sultan accepted his request after the slave traders displayed him in the place of sale in the bazaar. Then the sultan manumitted him and placed a robe on him. . . . The emperor departed for the capital of his kingdom and carried out what he had promised.⁹³

Ibn al-Athîr relates that, following his initial appearance before Alp Arslân, the Byzantine emperor told the Seljuk sultan:

"Stop your rebuke and do whatever you please." . . . The sultan asked him: "What do you think I shall do with you?" He answered: "You will either kill me, or you will slander me publicly in the land of Islam, or, and this is far-fetched, you will grant me pardon, accept a tribute, and make me one of your generals." He answered: "The latter is what I intend."⁹⁴

The degraded emperor was treated magnanimously by Alp Arslân. Ibn al-Jawzî relates that, bidding one another farewell, the emperor and the sultan embraced.⁹⁵

The emperor of the "Romans" had fallen into the hands of the "barbarians." The fortunes of the mighty empire sank to their lowest point, for the defeat of the Byzantine armies opened Anatolia to the Turks. While nothing in the defeat of Manzikert pointed to the swift conquest of Anatolia by the Turks, this victory gave the Turks the opportunity of exploiting the political weaknesses of the Byzantine empire.⁹⁶ The consequence was the

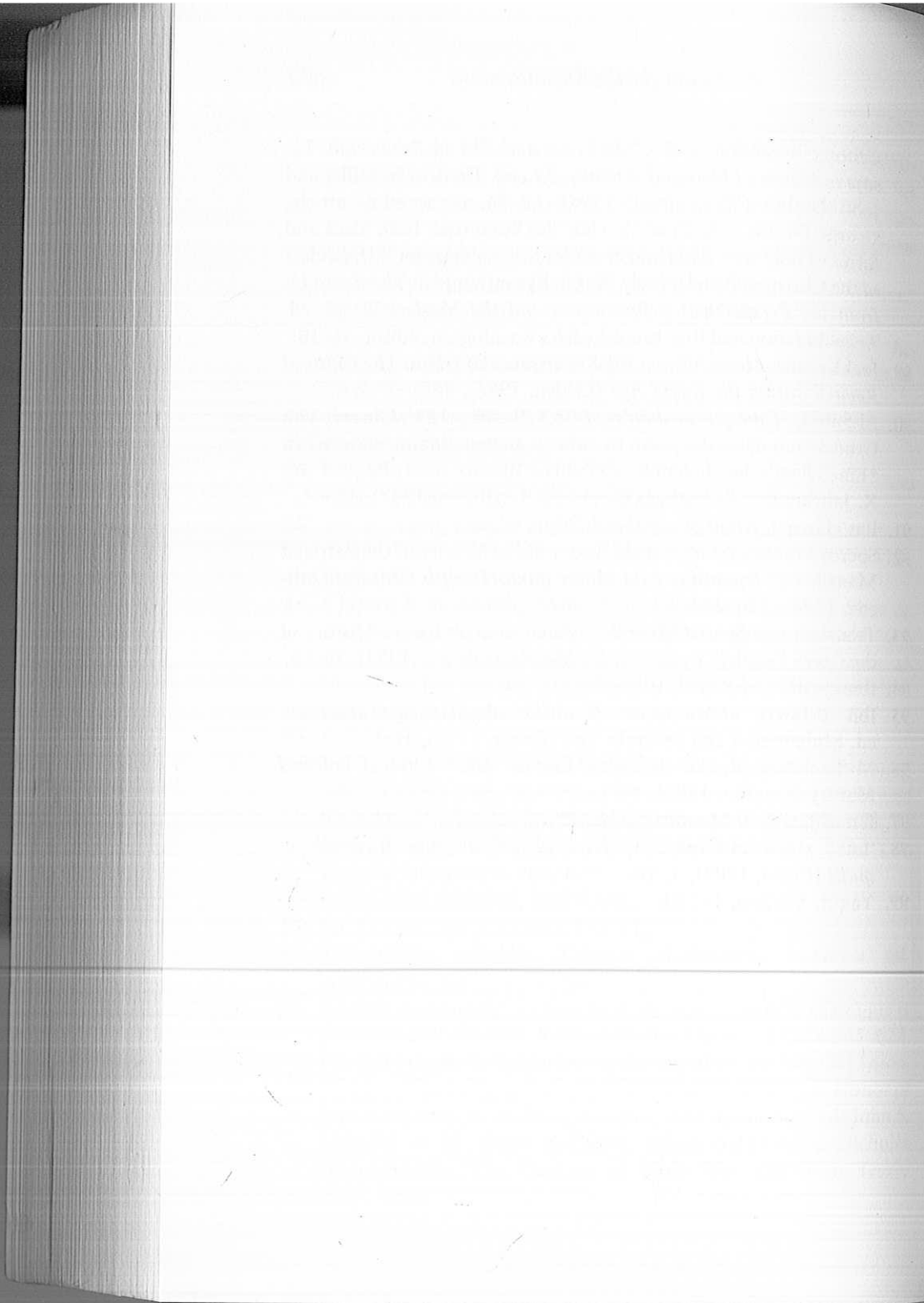
settlement of Turkish tribesmen in Asia Minor and the gradual process of the Islamization and Turkification of the population there. Ibn al-Jawzī recognized the importance of this victory, which was “a wonder,” and when the news of it reached Baghdad, trumpets were blown, crowds assembled, and the books of conquests were read aloud.⁹⁷

Thus, by the late fifth/eleventh century, the Byzantines and Arabs were geographically separated, and Muslim pressure on Byzantium would henceforth be exerted by the Turks. At the same time, the next two centuries were crucial for the Muslim world, which was in a state of political fragmentation. Syria was divided among rival Turkish emirs who were squandering their resources in internal wars, while Fatimid Egypt was trying to maintain its hold on Palestine. This political disintegration prevented any viable resistance to the Crusades, especially given the ideological division that split loyalties between the Abbasid caliphate and the Fatimid imamate. The success of the First Crusade and the establishment of Latin principalities in the Near East was the consequence of the disintegration of the Seljuk sultanate in the last decade of the fifth/eleventh century. The Arab authors were there to witness the conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders and the establishment of various Frankish principalities. However, many authors were also there to watch the Zankid reconquest, the triumph of the armies of Saladin in A.D. 1187, and the consolidation of the Sunni restoration. Indeed, the reconquest of Jerusalem by Saladin was an event of such magnitude that ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Kātib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 597/1201) writes that he chose to date his history “from the second *hijra* . . . this *hijra* being the *hijra* of Islam to Jerusalem, undertaken by sultan Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. . . . History would do well to be dated from this year.”⁹⁸ This passage suggests an acute sense of a new era with its own preoccupations, both practical and conceptual. The onslaught on the Mongols early in the seventh/thirteenth century and the ravages they wrought on the Islamic world constituted another turning point, ushering in a new period distinct from the previous one, as Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) writes: “In the

year 616 [1219/1220] there occurred events the like of which have not happened since the creation of the heavens and the earth. I refer to the arrival of the Mongols, may God forsake them, from the land of China.”⁹⁹

NOTES

1. Khalidi, “Islamic Views of the West in the Middle Ages.”
2. André Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du XI^{ème} siècle* (Paris, 1967–1980), 2:381–481.
3. Liliana Simeonava, “Foreigners in Tenth-Century Byzantium: A Contribution to the History of Cultural Encounter,” in *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider*, ed. Dion C. Smythe (Aldershot, 2000), 229–244.
4. Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 147–148.
5. Ibid., 147–148.
6. Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān*, 146.
7. Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, 139; Ibn Khurradadbeh, *Kitāb al-masālik*, 104–105.
8. Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, 142, 179; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, 2:41.
9. In line with earlier scholars, Liliana Simeonova attributes Ibn Yahyā’s journey to the very end of the ninth and beginning of the tenth century. See her “In the Depths of Tenth-Century Byzantine Ceremonial: The Treatment of Arab Prisoners of Wars at Imperial Banquets,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 22 (1998): 74–103.
10. Ibn Rusteh, *Kitāb al-a‘lāq al-nafisa*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden, 1892), 119–130; al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, 2: 261; Ibn Khurradadbeh, *Kitāb al-masālik*, 105. For the actual use of the gate by the emperor, see Raymond Janin, *Constantinople byzantine* (Paris, 1964), 269–273.
11. The *raṭl* of Baghdad was equal to 401.674 grams. See E. Ashtor, “Makāyil,” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edition, 4:117–121.
12. Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 147–148. See Sophie Métivier, “Note sur l’hippodrome de Constantinople vu par les Arabes,” *Travaux et Memoires* 13 (2000): 175–180.
13. Ibn Rusteh, *Kitāb al-a‘lāq*, 120–121.
14. Ibid., 123.
15. Ibid., 120–121; Ibn Hawqal, *Kitāb ṣūrat al-arḍ*, 195; al-



A New Reality: Revisiting Byzantium

By the fifth/eleventh century a tradition of depicting Byzantium had been elaborated. The new prevailing conditions—namely, the defeat of the Byzantines at Manzikert, the establishment of the Turks and Crusaders in the Near East, and later on, the Mongol invasions—provoked a certain shift in the image of Byzantium in our sources. The Crusaders became the main target of the later Arabic-Islamic texts, and the tone taken toward Byzantium softened.

Nevertheless, traditions about Byzantium forged during the Abbasid period continued to be transmitted, even if obsolete. Although the new political reality dictated a new ideology, it was unable to erase the inferior layers deposited during the course of centuries. The later Ayyubid and Mamluk authors thus juxtaposed contemporary perceptions alongside earlier views. Once chosen for inclusion within a standard Muslim corpus, the later texts continued to argue within the framework of set patterns, motifs, *topoi*, and polemics. However, there is also evidence to support the argument that Arab Muslim writers adapted and changed some of their assessments and views in response to changed circumstances and relations. The texts, in general, elaborated and maintained the Byzantine “reality” that

they encountered in earlier texts. At the same time, the authors reformulated their sense of the Byzantine empire at particular moments in its history. This chapter highlights the salient features of the shift in the image of Byzantium while remaining mindful of the dangers of repetition and redundancy.

The appearance of the Crusaders and the establishment of Crusader states in the Near East revolutionized relations between the Byzantines and their Muslim neighbors. If we are to believe Ibn al-Qalānisi (d. 555/1160), the Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus sent an embassy in A.D. 1110 with a message inviting the Muslims "to unite with him to expel the Franks from Syria."¹ The prospect of a joint Byzantine-Muslim coalition against any common enemy, and especially the Crusader states, would have been inconceivable at an earlier time. Yet their diverse forms of contact, particularly the diplomatic and the commercial, had permitted the two parties to become acquainted long before. The problematic relationship between the Byzantines and the Franks is recorded by al-Azimī (d. after 556/1161), who relates that the Crusaders swore oaths to Emperor Alexius that they would hand over to him the first fortress that they would conquer. Al-Azimī points out that the Franks did not keep their oaths. In A.D. 1190, the then Byzantine emperor, in conflict with the Crusaders, wrote to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn to inform him that prayers had been celebrated in his name at the Constantinople mosque. Moreover, he also apologized for the passage of German Crusaders through Byzantine territory.²

These good relations, which included important commercial transactions, extended into the reign of the Mamluk sultan Qalāwūn, who exchanged a sworn undertaking in A.D. 1281 with Emperor Michael VIII (A.D. 1259–1282) that vowed eternal love and friendship. This treaty, which formed the basis for future Byzantine-Mamluk relations, required Byzantium to remain neutral in conflicts between the sultanate and another Byzantine ally; it also bound the empire to assist Egypt with armed forces, if necessary, when confronted by a mutual enemy. The existence of threats common to both states led to an

intensification of relations that may be traced in the Mamluk texts and that is reflected by the relatively frequent exchange of embassies. The high level of interaction and trust is also indicated by the fact that Sultan Qalāwūn exiled the wife and children of his predecessor, Sultan Baybars, to Constantinople. It was the Mamluk fear of the Mongols of Persia and their need to maintain diplomatic and commercial relations with the Mongols of the Golden Horde that compelled Baybars and Qalāwūn to cultivate an amicable political relationship with Michael VIII—for the emperor had the ability to interrupt all navigation in the direction of the Black Sea. In turn, Michael VIII needed to live in peace with his neighbors to concentrate his attention on the restoration of the empire in Europe and the threat presented by Charles of Anjou.³

Mamluk Egypt and Paleologan Byzantium managed to maintain privileged relations into the ninth/fifteenth century. The Byzantines and Mamluks exchanged fifteen embassies at least during the second part of the seventh/thirteenth and all of the eighth/fourteenth century. The reception of these embassies was simple compared to what used to happen under the Abbasids. In Mamluk texts, nothing is said concerning the ceremonial aspect of the reception of ambassadors in general. In the ninth/fifteenth century, only one embassy is mentioned in the sources.⁴

The letter of Emperor Manuel II (r. A.D. 1391–1425) to Sultan al-Nāṣir Faraj in 814/1411–1412, which is included in al-Qalqashandī's encyclopedia of chancery craft, reminds al-Nāṣir of their then well-established relationship: "Friendship did not cease to reign between your father and our father until the last moment. . . . And as for us, thank God, our friendship has increased and multiplied and is confirmed . . . until eternity."⁵ The letter also alludes to intense diplomatic relations between the two states as ambassadors were frequently exchanged between the two courts. Furthermore, the use of such intimate words as *maḥabba* (love) and *mawadda* (affection) and the way that the emperor addresses the sultan also indicates their close relationship. Not only does the emperor use adjectives connoting great-

ness in his preamble, but he finishes by stating that the sultan is "more valued and cherished by me than the inhabitants of my kingdom." One has only to recall the insulting letters exchanged in the third/ninth century by Nicephorus I and Hārūn al-Rashīd and, in the late fourth/tenth century, by Nicephorus Phocas and Caliph al-Muṭī', to realize the transformation in the relations and reciprocal images of the two rivals.

HOMO BYZANTINUS:

THE NEW CHRISTIAN PRESENCE

The Byzantines are still referred to in our texts as *al-Rūm*. Occasionally, and especially during the early period of the Crusades, the term *al-Rūm* is used to refer to the Franks, reflecting the initial confusion of the Arab Muslim authors at this new Christian presence, especially since the Crusaders arrived along routes previously used by the Byzantine invaders. The confusion is well reflected in Ibn al-Athīr's *al-Kāmil*. While Ibn al-Athīr relates the conquest of Jerusalem designating the Crusaders by the term *Ifrañj*, he also includes in the same section a poem by al-Muẓaffar al-Abīwardī (d. 507/1113) recited on the same occasion in which he refers to the invaders as *al-Rūm*.⁶ However, as time passed, the new term *al-Ifrañj* was coined to refer to the Franks, in recognition of the emerging distinction between Byzantines and Crusaders.⁷ Indeed, it did not take long for a new image of the *Ifrañj*, dissociated from that of the Byzantines, to emerge. Nevertheless, both terms, *Ifrañj* and *Rūm*, were sometimes used to designate Christians in general.

Banū al-Aṣfar is another name that continued to be used in references to the Byzantines. Arab Muslim authors persisted in tracing the origins of the *Rūm* back to Abraham and in attempting to explain the common reference, *Banū al-Aṣfar*, in this context. The sixth/twelfth-century geographer Muḥammad al-Zuhri traces the origin of the *Rūm* back to Abraham and his son Isaac, while making a clear distinction between the *Rūm* and the *Yūnāniyyūn* (the ancient Greeks). Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/

1311), in his famous dictionary, *Lisān al-‘arab*, defines the *Rūm* as a known people who are traceable back to Esau, the son of Isaac. Yāqūt repeats information found in earlier sources and argues along the same lines.⁸

Another continuity with the earlier image of the Byzantines is the persistence of stereotypes concerning their physical appearance. The cosmographer al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1285) states that the Byzantines are usually fair in complexion, with blond hair and well-formed physiques. Similarly, the geographer Ibn Sa‘īd (d. 678 or 685/1274 or 1286) stresses the fairness of the Byzantines in stating that the inhabitants of the Sixth Clime are characterized by an extremely pale skin color, blue eyes, and blond hair and that they often have freckles on their faces. As mentioned earlier, these physical attributes were highly valued, as can be deduced from various *adab* works and special manuals delineating the then prevalent Arab typology of beauty. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa categorically states that the inhabitants of *bilād al-Rūm* are the most handsome in appearance.⁹

The Arab Muslim authors also reiterate the now entrenched belief in the Byzantines' unequalled skills in building, craftsmanship, and painting. Al-Idrīsī, who completed his work at the court of King Roger II of Sicily in 548/1154, describes the inimitable dome of the Cordoba mosque decorated with colored and golden mosaics sent to Caliph al-Nāṣir (r. 300–350/912–961) by the ruler of "great Constantinople." Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217), the Andalusian traveler whose *riḥla* (voyage) took place between A.D. 1183 and 1185, confirms through personal observation that the Byzantines are exceptional builders. After visiting the citadel of Cairo, he states that the stones of the surrounding trench have been fashioned with such talent that it is a lasting wonder. He notes that this was the handwork of Byzantine captives, "who are unmatched in such building skills." Ibn Jubayr stresses this same Byzantine artistry in relation to the city of Harrān, where he marvels at the main mosque and, particularly, one of its great domes, built by the *Rūm*. Naturally, Ibn Jubayr and, later, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, could not avoid seeing the Great Mosque

of Damascus; and both repeat the story, found in earlier works, claiming that the Umayyad caliph had ordered the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople to send him 12,000 artisans for its construction and adornment. Thus, even during the late Byzantine period, the Arabic sources still express tireless praise and admiration for Byzantine artisans and artists. As late as the seventh/thirteenth century, al-Harawī (d. 611/1215) states that there are, in Constantinople, bronze and marble statues, columns, and marvelous talismans, "the like of which may not be found in the lands of the Muslims."¹⁰

The image of the excellence of Byzantine artistry and craftsmanship probably survived because the monumental structures attached to this myth—namely, the Umayyad mosques in Damascus, Jerusalem, and Madina remained sanctuaries central to Islam. But attention was not only focused on the architectural accomplishments of the past; as is evident from the above reference to al-Harawī, Byzantine skills in the figurative and ornamentative arts continued to attract praise. Ibn Jubayr, mentioning the Church of Mary, describes it as being magnificently constructed and housing "marvelous paintings that bewilder the mind and transfix the gaze. It is a wondrous spectacle." Echoing a long tradition dating back to al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 254/868) and Ibn al-Faḥīh (d. 291/903), which depicted the Byzantines as "the nation most skilled in painting," al-Qazwīnī praises Byzantine virtuosity, saying: "They have great skill in painting; they paint the human figure laughing or weeping, jubilant or sorrowful."¹¹ This view is reiterated by the physician bibliographer Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (d. 668/1270) in his work, which includes a reference found in earlier texts to a correspondence between the caliph of Cordoba, al-Nāṣir, and the Byzantine emperor in the year 337/948. The exchange of letters was accompanied by gifts, among which featured the book of Dioscorides, painted in the "amazing Byzantine style [*al-ṭaṣwīr al-Rūmī al-ʿajīb*]."¹²

This same text of Dioscorides was the locus of seventh/thirteenth-century Arab illuminations that display an indebtedness to Byzantine iconographic methods, producing "Byzantine art

in Islamic garb." Indeed, several paintings found in the Dioscorides manuscript *De Materia Medica*, dated A.D. 1229, are rendered in a pure Byzantine style.¹³ The manuscript *Ayasofia* 3703, which also dates to the early seventh/thirteenth century and which also includes the *Kitāb al-ḥashā'ish* of Dioscorides, contains illustrations dependent on third/ninth-century Byzantine models. This manuscript reflects the political and cultural renaissance of the Abbasid caliphate. The Byzantine illustrations of this codex, the Hellenism of its language, and its codological characteristics all represent a revival of early Abbasid orientations.¹⁴ The fact that so much symbolism was inscribed into a translation of a Byzantine text serves to underline the still dominant cultural prestige of Byzantine civilization.

Also present in the sources, although with much less emphasis, are echoes of the discussion that permeated earlier texts concerning the role of the Byzantines in producing and disseminating the scientific and philosophical knowledge that was passed on to the Muslims. The tradition attributing the decline in the sciences to the change in direction dictated by the newly Christianized emperors of the late Roman period, is reiterated in seventh/thirteenth-century Arabic-Islamic sources. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a writes:

Thus, it [philosophy] continued until the coming of Christianity. Then, the teaching of philosophy came to an end in Rome, while it persisted in Alexandria until the Christian ruler looked into the matter. The bishops assembled and took counsel together on which parts of the teaching of philosophy should be kept and which should be abolished. They decided that the books on logic could be taught up to the assertoric figures . . . but no further, since they believed that everything beyond that would harm Christianity.¹⁵

A century later, Ibn Khaldūn states:

When the *Yūnān* were destroyed and the Roman emperors seized power and adopted Christianity, the intellectual sciences were shunned by them, as religious groups and their laws required.¹⁶

The texts' continued reliance on earlier sources confirms the Byzantines in their role as the repositories of ancient Greek knowledge. The Egyptian Ibn al-Qiftī (d. 646/1248) reproduces the story found in Ibn al-Nadīm's *al-Fihrist* concerning Caliph al-Ma'mūn's request for copies of ancient books then available in *bilād al-Rūm*. The Damascene historian, al-Jazarī (d. 793/1338), similarly refers to the report of a merchant, 'Abdallāh, who described the libraries of the Hagia Sophia as the place where one can find "all of the sciences" and books citing the names of cities, rivers, and springs.¹⁷ Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī (d. 749/1349) mentions that there are in Constantinople precious works written by the wise men and great philosophers of antiquity. None of these works has fallen into the hands of the Muslims because the patriarch and the priests guard them.¹⁸ Ibn Khaldūn includes the story of caliph al-Manṣūr's sponsorship of the translation of Euclid's *Elements*:

The Muslims . . . desired to study the philosophical disciplines. . . . Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr therefore asked the Byzantine emperor to send him translations of mathematical works. The emperor sent him Euclid's book and some works on physics. . . . The Greek work on this discipline that has been translated [into Arabic] is the book of Euclid. . . . It was the first Greek work to be translated in Islam in the days of Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr.¹⁹

Although Ibn Khaldūn states that the Byzantine emperors shunned the intellectual sciences, he also points out that scientific works were preserved in their libraries.²⁰ However, here as elsewhere, the debate over the Byzantines' contribution to knowledge, a salient theme in earlier centuries, is now relegated to the background. The information we have seems to indicate that, after over two centuries of intense activity, the translation movement in Baghdad lost its original impetus and eventually came to a halt around the turn of the millennium. The Greek books that were relevant to the concerns and demands of sponsors, scholars, and scientists had been translated and studied long before. Patrons were commissioning original

Arabic compositions rather than translations of Greek works.²¹ To a significant extent, a number of discussions regarding the ancient nations' contribution to knowledge had been the product of the *shu'ūbiyya* controversy that had earlier opposed Persians and other foreign cultures to Arabic culture within the Muslim empire. With the passions that this literary controversy had inspired now long extinguished, a number of related themes no longer appear in our texts.

The real rupture from the earlier image occurs in conjunction with Muslim attitudes toward the character and morals of the Byzantines. While the early sources are replete with accusations of sexual immorality, miserliness, treachery, and feminine immodesty, the later sources are much more restrained. Al-Qazwīnī includes a positive note on their character: "They are playful and joyful." Al-Nuwayrī (d. 733/1333) reiterates earlier allegations of Byzantine avarice when stating that four qualities cannot be found in four nations: generosity in the *Rūm*, fidelity in the Turks, courage in the Copts, and melancholy in the Africans. He further attributes to the Byzantines the characteristics of assiduity and arrogance.²²

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's *Rihla* contains a detailed account of his journey with Khātūn Bayalūn, the Byzantine princess who was the third wife of Khān Uzbek of the Golden Horde. During her first encounter with Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, the Byzantine princess "wept in pity and compassion, wiping her face with a handkerchief that lay before her," as she heard him speak of his circumstances and his distant native land. Her tears were the expression of her own longing for her native land, and her kind nature led her to ask the famous traveler to visit her again. Their journey together took them across the Russian steppes and the Balkans to Constantinople. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa describes the magnificent reception held by the princess's family prior to her entry into the Byzantine capital. Although at this point the Khātūn seemed to have abandoned Islam, professing once again her father's religion, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa is nonjudgmental. He neither denounces nor reproaches her. Instead, he extols her generosity both in extending her pro-

tection to him during his visit to Constantinople and in bestowing gifts on him.²³

The generally subdued tone of the criticisms that do appear in the texts constitutes a significant breach with earlier writings during the Abbasid period in which the negative image of Byzantium concentrated primarily on Byzantine character, morals, behavior, and customs. While Arab writers previously praised the Byzantines for their physical beauty and artistic skills, they reserved all of their vigor, vehemence, and vitriol for their disreputable character and morals. By refraining from detrimental comments that clearly reflect prejudicial opinions and stereotypes, the texts of the later centuries ultimately provide a more even and consistent image of the Byzantines.

The Mamluk period witnessed the development of amicable relations between the restored Byzantine empire and the Egyptian Mamluk state. In the face of common enemies, the Byzantine-Egyptian alliance served as a counterweight to the western Christian, Mongol, and Turkish threats, and a certain pragmatism led both of the allies to attenuate their religious differences. This is confirmed by an examination of Arab chronicles and other texts produced during the Mamluk period, which do not contain a hostile image of the Byzantines. For example, the term *kāfir* (infidel) is almost completely absent from references to the Byzantines. Mansouri has spotted only two instances of this term in the Mamluk sources, both of them written in the seventh/thirteenth century. One reference occurs on the occasion of the reopening of the mosque in Constantinople, where the author states "that the sultan . . . was very pleased at the mercy of God, . . . who had prepared this reward during this period and caused the prayer of Islam to be established in the country of the infidels."²⁴ Another example of the use of a negative description occurs with reference to the return of the children of Baybars from their exile in Constantinople. The author of the text states: "They have left the obscurity of *bilād al-Rūm* for the light of the lands of Islam."²⁵

Thus, these later Arabic-Islamic sources reveal both continui-

ties and discontinuities in Muslim representations of the Byzantines. The texts persist in associating Byzantium with beauty and artistry, but the earlier belittlement of their intellectual achievements, character, and morality, accompanied by empty rhetorical posturing, is no longer visible. The Byzantines were no longer assailed by such accusations, for the newly arrived Crusaders, with their "vulgarity" and their unfamiliar and terrifying ways, were deemed the inferiors of the refined and sophisticated Byzantines. The prince of Shayzar, Usāmah b. Munqidh (d. 584/1188), writes in his memoirs: "When one comes to recount cases regarding the Franks, he cannot but glorify Allah and sanctify him, for he sees them as animals possessing the virtues of courage and fighting but nothing else."²⁶ If the Muslims had once been shocked by Byzantine "immorality," they were now more deeply horrified by Frankish "depravity" and unprincipled behavior.

In contrast to the earlier portrayal of the Byzantines in the Arabic-Islamic texts, which focused on their character, morality, and practices, later writers show a remarkable lack of interest in personal details and blatantly negative judgments. The object of derision is no longer *Homo Byzantinus* but the Crusader. The rhetorical excesses once reserved for Byzantium and designed for home consumption have now shifted to the Franks. The omission of such negative descriptions with respect to the Byzantines, particularly on the more abstract, moral plane, is in itself a sign of the dawn of a new age.

CONSTANTINOPLE

The Muslim sources continued to affirm Constantinople's exceptional political, economic, and cultural importance to the Byzantine empire, despite the historical developments and mutations that it was undergoing before and during the time at which they were writing. Seventh-/thirteenth-century authors were aware of the two momentous events in the recent history of the city—namely, the massacre of the Latins in A.D. 1182 and the

conquest of the city by the Latins in A.D. 1204. With regard to the events of A.D. 1182, Ibn Jubayr relates the following confused and inaccurate story:

The report had it that the sovereign of Constantinople had died, leaving his kingdom to his wife and young son. But his cousin usurped the throne, killed the widow, and seized the boy. . . . The usurper fell in love with the boy's sister, who was famed for her beauty. Yet he could not marry her since it is forbidden for the *Rūm* to take their kinswomen in marriage. Impetuous love, blinding and deafening desire . . . impelled him to take her and go to Prince Mas'ūd, the sovereign of Konia. . . . The two of them embraced Islam . . . and married. . . . Then, with the backing of Muslim armies, he entered Constantinople, slaying some 50,000 of its inhabitants. The Muslims seized Constantinople, and all of its wealth was transported to Emir Mas'ūd. This conquest is one of the signs of the Hour.²⁷

Here, Ibn Jubayr has the Muslims conquering Constantinople in A.D. 1182 although nothing of the sort occurred until the Ottoman conquest in A.D. 1453. Furthermore, it was the Latin inhabitants of the city who were slaughtered by the Byzantines in the attack he describes. The last sentence quoted belongs to the Muslim apocalyptic literature, which developed in connection with the early military expeditions against the Byzantine capital in the second/eighth century. These traditions—which were found in the earliest texts, and especially in *ḥadīth* compilations—were still suitable for inclusion in later texts.

The dynastic history of Jamāl al-Dīn b. Wāṣil (d. 697/1298) provides the following significant alteration: "A letter from Nūr al-Dīn to al-Mustaḍī' [(566–575/1170–1180)] states: 'Constantinople and Jerusalem are both in the obscurity of profound darkness, waiting for the crow of familiarity. God the All-High, by his generosity, will hasten the harvest of both conquests for the Muslims.'"²⁸ The emphasis on Jerusalem, as well as the Byzantine capital, was not accidental in the period of the Crusades. Although the Muslim response to the Crusader move-

ment was initially hesitant, the impetus for a counter-Crusade gradually gained force. Propagandists for *jihād*, such as al-Sulāmī, harped on the special status of Jerusalem. Thus, the resurgence of the idea of the sanctity of Jerusalem in sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth-century Muslim texts is directly linked to its occupation by the Crusaders. Jerusalem's new situation made it the target of military campaigns and the main focus of Muslim political and ideological propaganda, simultaneously rendering it a main subject of contemporary literature.²⁹

This novel emphasis on Jerusalem is also reflected in Qur'anic exegetical literature of the period. The Shī'ī exegete, Abū 'Alī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153), explains the opening verses of *sūrat al-Rūm*, which refer to the first-/seventh-century Byzantine Persian wars in a totally new way. He states that "the believers will rejoice for the expulsion of the Persians from Jerusalem and not for the Byzantine victory over the Persians." Abū Ḥayyān similarly introduces Jerusalem into the picture: in "a few years," the Muslims will conquer the Holy City. Although the veneration of *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem) dates from the early Islamic period,³⁰ there was a resurgence of the idea of the city's sanctity during the reign of Zengi (d. 541/1146), and the reconquest of Jerusalem became one of Nūr al-Dīn's (d. 565/1174) major arguments in his campaign for Syrian unification. As a consequence, at least two major Qur'anic commentaries, the Shī'ī *Majma' al-bayān* and the Sunnite *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, played a role in the vigorous new literary genre of the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries—namely, the *faḍā'il al-Quds* literature. The conquest of Jerusalem, not Constantinople, was now postulated as the crowning achievement of the Muslim conquests. This change of focus meant that Constantinople was relegated, for a while and in certain texts—particularly religious ones—to a position of secondary importance, having lost its place of honor in a new discourse that reflected the prevailing conditions in the Near East.

As for the Latin conquest of Constantinople in A.D. 1204, Ibn

al-Athīr gives an account of the political circumstances that led to the usurpation of the city, describing how the Franks took the money and gold of the churches—even the precious ornamentation on crosses, icons, and bibles:

The Franks in the city, who were numerous, around 30,000, . . . rose with the help of the Franks, who were [then] besieging it and threw fire, time and again; thus, they burnt one-quarter of the city. They entered the city and ravaged it for three days, killing and plundering. All of the Byzantines were either killed or despoiled. A group of Byzantine aristocrats sought refuge in Hagia Sophia, but they were followed [there] by the Franks and, although a number of priests, monks and abbots came out to plead with them carrying crosses and bibles, the Franks disregarded them, murdering them all and plundering the church.³¹

The Arabic sources were thus aware of the systematic pillage of the city. In addition to the killings and the theft of treasures, Ibn al-Athīr points to the most striking act, the plundering of Hagia Sophia. He also explains how Baldwin of Flanders was crowned in Constantinople, although the *Rūm* never recognized his authority, instead making Nicaea the provisional capital of the Byzantine empire under the rule of the Lascarid (al-Ashkarī). Ibn al-Athīr was not alone in realizing just how consequential these military and political developments were. Ibn Wāṣil also mentions the conquest of Constantinople by the Latins, writing in his chronicle: "In this year [A.H. 600], *al-Ifranj* left their lands in great numbers and conquered Constantinople. It remained with *al-Ifranj* until A.H. 660, when the *Rūm* took it back." Yāqūt similarly notes that "today, [Constantinople] is in the hands of the Franks."³²

At a later date, Ibn Khaldūn reports the Frankish conquest of Constantinople and explains, in some detail, the circumstances leading to it. Ibn Khaldūn relates the Latin invasion of the city, in A.D. 1204, accompanied by excessive killing and plundering. The Byzantines tried to hide in the great church, and

when the priests, monks, and bishops ventured out, holding copies of the New Testament and crosses, they were all killed. Al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418) similarly mentions the Latin conquest of the city and the outrageous plunder and murder of priests, monks, and bishops.³³

While relations between Byzantine and western Christians had reached their lowest point, incidents in Constantinople on the eve of the Latin conquest are revealing of the much improved atmosphere between Byzantines and Muslims. In A.D. August 1203, at the height of the tension between Byzantines and Crusaders, a band of Flemings, Venetians and Pisans attacked and pillaged the Muslim quarter of the city and burnt the mosque. The Byzantine historian Niketas Choniates mentions that the native Byzantines came to the rescue of the Muslims. Later in his text, he contrasts the Muslims' magnanimous behavior toward the Latins following their recapture of Jerusalem in A.D. 1187 with the way that the Latins treated the Byzantines and their capital in A.D. 1204.³⁴

Our authors were not only aware of the Latin conquest of Constantinople and its significance; they were also informed about the Byzantine reconquest of the city in A.D. 1261. Although he does not specify the date, al-Qalqashandī mentions that "Michael the Lascarid" succeeded in defeating the Franks and in recapturing the city; he adds that "the Lascarids continue to rule until the present." Ibn Khaldūn also reports that the descendants of "Michael the Lascarid" were still the kings of Constantinople in his own day.³⁵ The reference to Michael VIII as the Lascarid was, of course, wrong. Michael was the founder of the Paleologan dynasty that succeeded the Lascarids, the Byzantine emperors during the period of exile in Nicaea. Al-Ashkharī, a corruption of Lascarid, was applied in our texts to all of the emperors of the Lascarid and Paleologan dynasties. It is to be noted that Ibn Khaldūn ends his focused discussion on Byzantine history in the late seventh/thirteenth century. The Byzantine eighth/fourteenth century is not completely ignored.

However, the list of Byzantine emperors stops, and Ibn Khaldūn concludes, almost too briefly, by pointing to the increasing power of the Ottomans, whose successful counteroffensive has managed to reduce the dominion of the Byzantines to an insignificant area.³⁶

What was the Arab image of Constantinople during the sixth/twelfth, seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries, as so much had happened? Statements in the later sources confirm earlier depictions of this capital as exceptional and unique. Al-Harawī tells us that "Constantinople is a city even greater than its reputation," and al-Qazwīnī proclaims that "nothing like it was ever built, neither before nor after" and, even "if it is no longer that way, . . . it remains a great city." Yāqūt states that reports of the capital's greatness and beauty abound, while Ibn Khaldūn describes Constantinople as "the magnificent city, seat of the caesars, containing works famous for their construction and splendor."³⁷

Such observations were not restricted to the Arab authors; western authors were similarly amazed by the great city. Geoffroy de Villehardouin, writing on the conquest of Constantinople by the Latins in A.D. 1204, states: "Many of our men, I may say, went to visit Constantinople, to gaze at its many splendid palaces and tall churches and view all the marvelous wealth of a city richer than any other since the beginning of time."³⁸ However, the western image of Constantinople during the period of the Crusades contains inherent negative components reflected in the words of Odo of Deuil, who, after praising Constantinople's wealth and glory, draws a pejorative conclusion: "In every respect, she [Constantinople] exceeds moderation; for just as she surpasses other cities in wealth, so too, does she surpass them in vice."³⁹

Unlike the western view of Constantinople, which moves from praise to denigration, the later Arabic-Islamic texts rarely, if ever, indulge in negative comments. If a few earlier Arabic texts had openly associated Constantinople with arrogance and

pride,⁴⁰ the post-sixth-/twelfth-century texts describe the city's opulence without the slightest hint of judgment. The only outright negative comments found in our sources are repetitions of earlier traditions that point to the city's certain damnation. The Damascene Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176) cites, in his biographical work, the following *ḥadīth*: "Four cities in this world are from paradise: Mecca, Madina, Jerusalem, and Damascus; and four cities are from fire: Constantinople, Ṭabariyyā, Antioch, and Ṣan'ā'."⁴¹ Moreover, the apocalyptic dream of conquest lingers. Contemporary Muslim apocalypses mention the fall of Constantinople as a precondition for the achievement of peace in the land of Islam. *Ṣayḥat al-būm fī ḥawāḍith al-Rūm*, attributed to the great Sufi Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), states that the Mahdī will lead an army of ten thousand soldiers against Constantinople and will invite the king of the *Rūm* to accept Islam. When he refuses, the Mahdī will kill the Byzantine emperor, and the Muslims will seize the wealth of the city. At that point, news will arrive that the *dajjāl* has come.⁴²

Politically, economically and culturally, the Arab authors still held Constantinople in the highest regard. Al-Idrīsī, writing in the mid-sixth/twelfth century—before the Latin conquest of the city—states that "Constantinople is prosperous, having markets and merchants, and its people are affluent."⁴³ This impression of the city as a wealthy center of economic activity continues to be pervasive in the seventh/thirteenth century—that is, after the disastrous Latin conquest of A.D. 1204. Al-Jazarī mentions the arrival of the merchant 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad in Damascus in 692/1293. During the reign of Andronicus II Paleologos (r. A.D. 1282–1328), 'Abdallāh had lived for twelve years in Constantinople, after leaving Syria because of the Mongol invasions. In the eyes of Ibn Jubayr, the fact that he had lived in a non-Muslim country for a protracted period warranted an apology. Indeed, the patronizing Ibn Jubayr remarks that "there is no excuse in the eyes of God for a Muslim to stay in an infidel country save when passing through it."⁴⁴ Asked by the father of the nar-

rator whether it was permissible for a *hāj*j (one who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca) to establish himself among the *Ifran*j (here meaning Christians), the merchant answers:

"My brother, if I were to tell you about this city, you would understand better, and you would realize that those who inhabit it have nothing to fear. They can do whatever they please and, at the same time, make a considerable profit." Asked to describe it, he says: "It is a great city on the seashore, comparable to Alexandria, and it takes one morning to cross it from end to end. There is a place as large as two-thirds of Damascus, surrounded by walls with a gate, which is reserved exclusively for the occupation of the Muslims. There is equally a similar place for the Jews. . . . There are one hundred thousand churches, less one. . . . When I asked, I was told that the ruler of Constantinople has an equal number of kings at his service, each with his own church. He completed the number by building the great church. . . . It is one of the most considerable and marvelous buildings that can be seen."⁴⁵

‘Abdallāh lived in Constantinople after the Byzantine restoration in A.D. 1261, when the city had regained some of its earlier opulence. His extended stay in the city afforded him the time and the opportunity to experience it as a reality. ‘Abdallāh describes a wealthy, robust, and powerful Constantinople that is pervaded by a plethora of monuments and churches and is once again an economic powerhouse. Nothing in his description accuses or condemns: on the contrary, he gives evidence of the pride of one who has lived in a great city. ‘Abdallāh, like all our authors, has only praise for Constantinople. Indeed, in spite of the catastrophes that befell the Byzantine capital in the late sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, it remains a model of affluence and material magnificence in our texts.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's *Riḥla* reflects the long evolution that had altered the landscape of the city. He notes the strong presence of the Latin element and states that the city is divided into two areas. The Latin quarter is called al-Ghalaṭa:

It is reserved for the Christian Franks, who dwell there. They are of different origins: Genoese, Venetians, and the people of Rome and France. They are all men of commerce, and their port is one of the greatest ports. . . . Its bazaars are good but overlaid with filth.⁴⁶

The other half of the city is called Istanbul, and it

includes the places of residence of the sultan [emperor], the functionaries of the state, and the population. Its bazaars and streets are spacious and paved with flagstones, . . . and the practitioners of each craft have a separate space. . . . The majority of the artisans and retailers are women.⁴⁷

In discussing the westernized portion of the city, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa emphasizes the presence of the Italian merchants and the importance of their economic role. Galata, granted to the Genoese by Michael VIII, became extremely prosperous due to its role in international trade. Al-'Umarī, through a conversation with a Genoese merchant, stresses the cosmopolitan nature of the Byzantine capital: merchants from all regions can exercise commerce freely.⁴⁸ At the same time, the involvement of Constantinople's eastern population in commerce and craftsmanship was also significant, as was the relatively large number of women engaged in such activities in it.

Following its capture by the Crusaders in A.D. 1204, Constantinople never regained its large population, and it could no longer claim to be the greatest city on the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, it continued to have a disproportionate significance for both Byzantines and Arabs. The later Arabic-Islamic sources inevitably include a few major Constantinopolitan monuments that served as archetypal symbols of the city whether or not they were actually visited by the authors. The texts list these same specific monuments with very similar descriptions and include the same types of comments—perhaps unsurprisingly, since the authors copied one another's descriptions. The list, which constituted a "medieval tourist paradigm,"⁴⁹ included Hagia

Sophia, the Golden Gate, the Column of Justinian, the Column of Theodosius, the Horlogium, and the Bronze Horses. Hagia Sophia, absent from the earlier description of Constantinople by Hārūn b. Yahyā, takes a place of prominence in these later sources. According to al-Harawī, "the great church is Hagia Sophia."⁵⁰ Al-Dimashqī describes "the Great Church, where it is said that an angel resides" and where lies "a colossal high altar with huge doors and columns."⁵¹ Al-Jazarī also includes a description of Hagia Sophia provided by the merchant 'Abdallāh:

The church is one of the most considerable and marvelous buildings to be seen. The place in which they stand for praying is surrounded by grills. . . . On the walls of this church are represented all of the cities of the world and all of the skills. When one of them wants to chose a skill for his son, he takes him to the walls and shows him the skills.⁵²

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa similarly focuses on Hagia Sophia as the central monument of the city:

I will describe its exterior having not seen its interior. It was built by . . . the cousin of [Prophet] Solomon. . . . It is one of the greatest churches of the *Rūm*. It is surrounded by walls, as if it were a city. Its gates are thirteen in number, and it has a sacred enclosure. No one is prevented from entering the enclosure. . . . It is like an audience hall paved with marble and traversed by a water stream . . . that flows between two walls constructed of marble, inlaid with pieces of different colors and cut with the most skillful art.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa also mentions the wealth of the church, with particular reference to the golden frame of the cross and the main door, which was covered in plaques of silver and gold.⁵³

Ibn Jubayr, al-Qazwīnī, Yāqūt, and al-Jazarī all provide lengthy descriptions of the column of Justinian, which are essentially the same. Ibn Jubayr states that the equestrian statue of Justinian sits on top of a bronze column. The emperor has his right hand raised and his palm open, as if pointing toward the realm of Islam. In his left hand, he holds a globe: "Opinions vary concerning this monument. Some think that the globe is a

talisman with the power to inhibit the enemy from invading their country; others say that the globe holds an inscription that says: 'I have possessed the world, and I held it in my hand like this globe; I left it without taking anything.'" Al-Harawī similarly talks about the talismanic nature of the statue: "In his hand is a talisman that prevents the enemy from invading the country."⁵⁴ Al-Harawī includes a description of the Column of Theodosius in his work: "There is a white marbled column in the market . . . entirely covered with three-dimensional sculptures of admirable workmanship." It is surrounded by a grill that includes a talisman, and if one climbs to the top of it, he can see the city in its entirety: "In my *Kitāb al-'ajā'ib*, I will . . . talk about the veneration the inhabitants of this land profess for it and for the figures that cover it." Here, although al-Harawī mentions the talismanic element of this column, he does not explain what kind of power it was reputed to have.⁵⁵

Al-Qazwīnī gives some details of the Horlogion, the clock that so impressed the Arab authors: "In the lighthouse of Constantinople there is a Horlogium, which is made up of twelve doors, each representing an hour. At every hour, one of the doors opens, and a statue comes out. . . . The Byzantines say that it is the work of the wise Bīnās (Apollonius)." Al-Qazwīnī also attributes to Apollonius the creation of the three bronze horses, a talisman located at the gate of the imperial palace to prevent the horses of the city from making unnecessary noise or neighing. Thus, the assumption that a significant number of the monuments and statues in Constantinople were endowed with talismanic or magical powers continued unabated and even increased in the later texts. Describing the palace of Constantinople as one of the wonders of the world, al-Qalqashandī talks about walking into it between "two lanes of hollow beautiful [bronze statues representing] human beings, horses, and lions. . . . In the palace there is a large variety of astounding automatons [*'ajā'ib al-maṣnū'āt*]."⁵⁶

As for the hippodrome, it is now mentioned by al-Idrīsī not as a *maydān* [race course] but as a *mal'ab* (circus). While the races

had been at the center of the testimony of Hārūn b. Yahyā, they disappear from the later texts. Al-Harawī and al-Qazwīnī fail to mention the races limiting their descriptions to one or two columns. The Arab authors seem to have progressively abandoned all historical considerations with regard to the hippodrome, making the symbolic significance of the place prevail.⁵⁷

In addition to all these typically Byzantine monuments, the geographers and travelers of the later period mention the Islamic monuments of the city. They reproduce the legend of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, the Companion of the Prophet, who participated in the expedition against Constantinople in the year 48–49/668–669. Both Ibn al-Athīr and al-Dimashqī mention the tomb of Abū Ayyūb. Al-Qazwīnī describes this tomb as being by the walls of Constantinople and says that its soil is venerated by the Byzantines, who go there to pray for rain during times of drought.⁵⁸

The second important Islamic monument mentioned in our sources is the mosque connected with the name of Maslama, the leader of the Muslims' greatest expedition against Constantinople in 97–99/715–717. The mosque is discussed in conjunction with the restoration of Constantinople to the Byzantines in 660/1261. Ibn Jubayr states that the Byzantine emperor rebuilt Maslama's mosque in 455/1263. Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir (d. 692/1291) adds that the Byzantine emperor had come on Maslama's mosque while touring the city with Mamluk Egypt's envoy. At one time, Saladin had asked permission to reconstruct the mosque, but the Byzantines had refused him. According to Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, God had postponed the performance of this blessed duty, leaving it to serve as a reward for al-Zāhir Baybars (658–676/1260–1277) and a glory for his state. When the Sultan heard of this, "he was pleased at the mercy of God, . . . who had prepared this reward during this period and caused the prayer of Islam to be established in the country of the infidels."⁵⁹ Thus, as late as the late seventh/thirteenth century—and despite the recent destruction of the city by the Latins—Constantinople's symbolic importance had not diminished. Rebuilding this

mosque in Constantinople brought glory and prestige to the Muslim ruler and symbolized the extent of his power and influence.

A few sources refer to two other Muslim tombs in Constantinople. Both al-Dimashqī and al-Harawī mention a tomb built for a descendant of al-Ḥusayn, son of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, while al-Zuhrī mentions the tomb of Abū 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ, a Companion of the Prophet who played a pivotal role in the early history of Islam and who is counted among *al-'ashara al-mubashshara* (the ten believers), to whom paradise was promised. Al-Zuhrī states that Abū 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ died during Maslama's expedition and was buried near the walls of Constantinople and that the *Rūm* still light candles at his grave. Although al-Zuhrī may be confusing the tombs of Abū Ayyūb and Abū 'Ubayda, the fact that such prominent and revered personalities are named in the same breath as Constantinople is a testimony to the high esteem and quasi-veneration in which our sources held the Byzantine capital. The presence of Islamic monuments in Constantinople was important in that they provided a symbolic possession of the city. The existence of Islamic monuments linked to major figures of Islamic mythology both Islamized and sacralized the Byzantine capital, providing Constantinople with some semblance of a Muslim genealogy.⁶⁰ In fact, the presence of these graves within the walls of the city permitted the inclusion of Constantinople in pilgrimage itineraries like the one compiled by al-Harawī.

The Arab Muslim authors concentrated on the marvels of the city and on its Islamic monuments: talking about Constantinople meant talking about a small number of monuments that represented the entire city. They appreciated its diversity and opulence, the many marvels imputed with occult powers and, of course, those monuments invested with Muslim religious significance. In these later descriptions, the city remained harmonious, rational, and orderly, and the fascination of the Arab writers with it was unaffected by the city's various mutations, which sealed its decline. The authors do not talk about a dilapi-

dated, shabby Constantinople; in their imaginations, the city had survived all of its catastrophes intact.

The idea of Constantinople and the fascination it inspired remained the focus of the Arab-Muslim literary tradition on Byzantium. Indeed, the vast majority of references to the empire contained in the later sources are largely references to its capital. This had become a virtual necessity with the gradual but considerable territorial losses incurred by the Byzantines; by the eighth/fourteenth century, the empire had been reduced to Constantinople. Al-Qalqashandī points that "only Constantinople and its surrounding territories still lie in the hands of the Byzantine emperors. The Franks have seized its western territories, while the Muslims have taken possession of the territory east of the Gulf and many districts on the western side of the Gulf."⁶¹ For centuries, Constantinople had been the center and symbol of the mighty Byzantine empire; in the end, it became the empire.

The most surprising characteristic of our authors' descriptions of the Byzantine capital is the absence of deprecatory comments and criticism, starting with Hārūn's impartiality and ending with Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's perplexed wonder. Constantinople remained a great city, wealthy and full of wonders. Indeed, the chronological gap between the early and later writers is revealing; there is a definite continuity in the image of Constantinople, an image untarnished by the various catastrophes to which the city eventually succumbed. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's bedazzlement obscured the fact that the great city had been repeatedly plundered and ravaged and that it had suffered the effects of the empire's general decline. Yet this is the image of Constantinople with which we are left: a stereotype based on old depictions, references, and *topoi*, particularly reflected in the description of those monuments that came to signify the city. The Arab image, spanning centuries, seems an anachronistic exaltation of the city that it once was.

From the earliest days of Islam, geographers and travelers gave detailed and laudatory descriptions of the Byzantine capi-

tal, causing the city and its mystique to find a permanent place in a wide variety of literary genres, including Muslim apocalyptic literature. Irrespective of the level of access to "real" information, the Byzantine capital continued to play a role in the Arab Muslim unconscious. The fascination with the city persisted until its fall in 1453. The texts persevered in performing the ambivalence felt toward the Byzantine metropolis, the mixture of attraction and aversion, admiration and desire for appropriation. Even during its decline, Arab Muslim authors wrote about it with great enthusiasm, for Constantinople was, as it were, an entire world.

THE FALL

The eighth/fourteenth century was for Byzantium a period of political disaster. The fragmentation of the empire brought about by the fourth Crusade, the commercial and naval concessions conferred on Venice and Genoa, the destruction caused by the Catalan company, the increasing penetration and consolidation of the Turks in Anatolia, and a series of civil wars and plagues left the empire diminished, underpopulated, and impoverished. The weakness of the Byzantine empire contrasted with the vigorous organization of the Ottoman empire whose territory, by the end of the eighth/fourteenth century, covered the greater part of Asia Minor and the Balkan peninsula.

The gradual decline of the Byzantine empire was observed and remarked on by a number of Arab historians and geographers. In Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's list of the seven kings who are "the great and mighty of this world," he mentions the rulers of Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Uzbek, Turkistān, India, and China.⁶² The Byzantine emperor, who had consistently featured in earlier such lists, was, at last, omitted. Writing in the eighth/fourteenth century, Ibn Khaldūn reformulated his sense of the Byzantine empire in light of his times. He was clearly aware that the Byzantine empire had systematically lost ground to the Ottomans, who had almost completed the conquest of Asia Minor and had, in addi-

tion, conquered and settled in the Balkans. Ibn Khaldūn states that east of the straits of Constantinople is located the realm of Ibn 'Uthmān with its chief city in Bursa. He pointed out that this region used to belong to the Byzantines. Ibn 'Uthmān now "exerts authority over the ruler of Constantinople and is master of the domains from all sides."⁶³

The capture of Constantinople was not a strategic necessity for the Ottomans, since they had managed to rule their adjacent possessions without much interference. Nevertheless, Constantinople's continued existence as practically a city-state, stood in the way of the territorial unity of the Ottoman domains. Much like other Muslim rulers before him, the Ottoman sultan, Mehmet the Conqueror, was conscious of the political, religious, and commercial significance of the city. But its greatest value was as a symbol, for it simultaneously provoked the envy and the awe of enemies. Mehmet did have enemies: he was locked in a power struggle with rivals from the Turkish nobility. He chose to fortify his position by embarking on a great military victory, and in the words of Stanford Shaw, "nothing could be more spectacular than the conquest of Constantinople."⁶⁴

The conquest of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmet on 29 May 1453 shocked the Christian world. The great historic Christian city had passed into the hands of the infidels. This event was widely reported at the time and lamented for many years afterward. Pope Nicholas issued a bull to all the princes of the west preaching a Crusade. Philip the Good, the Duke of Burgundy, presided at a banquet where all the company swore to go to holy war. The Oath of the Pheasant, as it was called, was never fulfilled. Thus, although the princes hastened to collect reports on the fall of the city, and writers wrote horrified laments, there was no Crusade.⁶⁵

Following their initial shock and despair, the Byzantines turned to lamentation, as they recalled their fallen city. Constantinople and, more specifically, the Hagia Sophia came to symbolize a grandeur and glory forever lost. First interpreted in prophetic terms, the conquest gradually entered the realm of myth

and legend. The illiterate masses developed a folklore that attempted to explain the alteration of their world and promised themselves, through prophetic pronouncements, that the Greeks would eventually rise again to defeat the Turks and reinstate their empire.⁶⁶ An eighteenth-century Arab-Christian manuscript from Aleppo bears witness to the enduring reverberation that the fall of the Byzantine capital and the dream of reconquest were to have.⁶⁷

Sultan Mehmet's success, where so many others had failed, represented the culmination of centuries of Muslim effort, the realization of one of the most cherished and enduring aims of medieval Islam and the actualization of prophecies found in Islamic eschatological texts. Speculation about the last day, the appearance of the *dajjāl*, and the role of the *mahdī* had continued to appear in the texts, often intermingled with ruminations on the future conquest of Constantinople. Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* embodies the apocalyptic traditions portending the cataclysmic end of time, including the inevitable acquisition of the Byzantine capital. He mentions "the *mahdī*, who will lead people in the midprayer, renew Islam, and cause justice to triumph. He will conquer the Andalusian peninsula, will reach and take Rome, and will march onward toward the Orient and subjugate it. He will master Constantinople, and the government of the whole world will be his."⁶⁸

Ibn Taghrībirdī (d. 874/1469) recounts Cairo's reaction to the news of the city's conquest. A delegation sent by Mehmet II arrived to congratulate Sultan Ināl on his accession and to announce the fall of Constantinople at the hands of Mehmet II:

He conquered the city of Istanbul by force and took possession of it after a mighty confrontation on Tuesday, 20 Jumāda, in the year 857. They had laid siege to it on 26 Rabī' I. . . . The envoy arrived with two captives belonging to the Constantinopolitan élite and traveled with the captives through Cairo, which was decorated. The Sultan was delighted at the great conquest, along with everyone else. The good tidings were proclaimed and Cairo was deco-

rated for days. . . . In short, the arrival of this ambassador with such fine news was a great event.⁶⁹

Ibn Iyās (d. ca. 930/1524) similarly highlights the fall of Constantinople: "The conquest was on 20 Jumāda al-Awwal, of this year. When the news reached the sultan [of Egypt], the good tidings were proclaimed, and Cairo was decorated. Then the sultan appointed an ambassador to the son of 'Uthmān to congratulate him for this greatest of conquests."⁷⁰ These contemporary texts exult in the conquest of Constantinople but allot very little space in announcing it. Moreover, the authors do not halt to analyze or reflect on their own rejoicing and on the historical significance of the event. Clearly, the event was momentous but only in an imaginary way. In real terms, Constantinople had long ceased to be of practical political and military significance. Its importance rested on ideological and almost mythical grounds. From the earliest times, Constantinople had been the ultimate goal of the Muslim conquests, and its continuous presence in the Arabic Islamic texts throughout the medieval period reflects its symbolic importance as an ideal city representing the totality of the achievements of a grandiose Christian civilization. With the conquest of the Byzantine capital, one of the inveterate dreams and most cherished goals of Islamic ideology was realized.

The conquest of the city continued to be performed in Arab Ottoman texts well into the late seventeenth century. Wishing to underscore the importance of the conquest, the Ottoman historian, al-Qaramānī (d. 1019/1610), writes that "undoubtedly, this is one of the greatest and most glorious conquests. How many caliphs and kings had coveted its capture, investing their attention, effort and money, wasting their years and their soldiers to no avail." In his panegyric of the young Ottoman sultan, al-Qaramānī reiterates the Arab-Muslim textual tradition on Byzantium: Sultan Mehmet's only concern was the conquest of the great city, Constantinople the magnificent, one of the most vast, most populous, and best-fortified cities.⁷¹

Al-Qaramānī had to fit the conquest in the line of earlier pre-

dictions that go back to the early days of Islam. He does that by mentioning a contemporaneous prophecy predicting the exact time of Constantinople's conquest: Sultan Mehmet had sent his vizier, Aḥmad Pasha, to Shaykh Aq Shams al-Dīn and Shaykh Aq Bīq, inviting them to partake in *jihād* and be present with him at the conquest of Constantinople. Shaykh Shams al-Dīn announced to the vizier the good news of victory. He said: "You will conquer Constantinople, if God wills it, at the hands of the Muslims." When the Sultan entered the city, his vizier was standing next to him, and he said: "This is what the shaykh has foretold. . . . I do not rejoice in this conquest but in the presence of such a man in my time."⁷²

Al-Qaramānī tells us how the kings of the world came to fear the sultan on hearing of this event. The rulers of Egypt, of the 'Ajam [non-Arabs], and of the Arabs sent him letters congratulating him on his feat. The Sharīf of Mecca wrote Mehmet the Conqueror, calling him "the one who has aided Islam and the Muslims, the Sultan of all kings and sultans . . . resuscitator of the Prophet's *sharī'a*." To clothe this message with symbolic meaning, he informs Mehmet the Conqueror that his letter was opened and read "in front of the Ka'ba and in the presence of the people of Ḥijāz and the Arabs." He comments on the miracle of the conquest of Constantinople, "known for being indomitable in the eyes of all."⁷³ The indomitable city had fallen, to the surprise of all. With the fall of Constantinople, the millennial struggle between Islam and Byzantium was finally put to rest.

NOTES

1. Ibn al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl Tārīkh Dimashq*, ed. H. F. Amedroz (Leiden, 1908), 173.
2. Claude Cahen, "La chronique abrégée d'al-Azimi," *Journal asiatique* 230 (1938): 353-448.
3. For the text of the treaty in English, see P. M. Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260-1290): Treaties of Baybars and Qalāwūn with Christian Rulers* (Leiden, 1995), 22-128; Mansouri, *Recherches*, 126-128; Marius Canard, "Un traité entre Byzance et l'Égypte au

- Graeco-Arabica* 3 (1984) : 109–117, and “Constantinopla en los geografos Arabes,” *Erytheia* 9 (1988) : 49–60. See also Maya Yazigi, “*Ḥadīth al-‘ashara* or the Political Uses of Tradition,” *Studia Islamica* 86 (1997): 159–167.
61. Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a‘shā*, 5:381.
 62. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Rihla*, 331.
 63. Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘ibar*, 1:127; 2:488–489.
 64. Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge, 1976), 1:55.
 65. Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (London, 1965), 165–166.
 66. Asterios Argyriou, *Les exégèses grecques de l’apocalypse à l’époque Turque (1453–1825)* (Thessalonica, 1982); Vryonis, “Byzantine Attitudes.”
 67. Souad Slim Abouelrousse, “L’impact de la chute de Constantinople sur les mentalités arabes chrétiennes à Alep au XVIII^e siècle,” *Parole de l’Orient* 2 (1996): 199–213.
 68. Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-‘ibar*, 1:579.
 69. Ibn Tagrībī, *Ḥawāḍith al-duhūr fī mada al-ayyām wa al-shuhūr*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Izz al-Dīn (Beirut, 1990), 2:453.
 70. Ibn Iyās, *Badā’i‘ al-zuhūr fī waqā’i‘ al-duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Wiesbaden, 1972), 2:316.
 71. Al-Qaramānī, *Akhbār al-duwal*, 3:27.
 72. *Ibid.*, 3:29–30.
 73. Text of letter in Abdel Jelil Temimi, “Les relations arabo-ottomanes à la suite de la prise de Constantinople en 1453,” *Revue d’histoire maghrébine* 47–48 (1987): 257–266.

Conclusion

It has been a premise of this work that the image of Byzantium was conditioned by the fluctuations of Muslim-Byzantine relations, by the circumstances of the international conjuncture, and by the internal conditions of the Islamic world. This work has, furthermore, argued that the image of Byzantium was also shaped within the texts as the authors carried on a tradition inherited from previous ages. Bound as they were by the textual tradition and by the particular genre and conceptual framework within which they were operating, the authors and compilers reproduced the earlier conceptions of Byzantium's image but reformulated their sense of the Byzantine empire under novel and changed circumstances. This work has, moreover, maintained that the image of Byzantium in the Arabic-Islamic sources was used as a ploy to enhance the image of its Muslim counterpart. Thus, while the Byzantine empire was a real entity with which the Islamic polity had to deal with, Byzantium was also an imaginary category of difference against which Islam defined itself.

During the period of the Muslim conquests, at that crucial moment in the political and cultural contact between the two cultures, Byzantium suffered the loss of important territory while the Muslim armies expanded in virtually all directions.

The momentum of Muslim conquest was at its strongest during the periods of the Orthodox caliphs (*al-Rāshidūn*) and their Umayyad successors. This was the time of Byzantium's profoundest influence on the nascent Islamic civilization. The Arabic-Islamic texts tend to be favorable toward Byzantium when referring to these early encounters. This may be related to the monotheism of the Byzantines and to the respect that early Muslims had for the Byzantine political tradition embodied by one of its most prominent representatives, Emperor Heraclius. It may also be associated with the great admiration the Muslims had for Byzantium's material magnificence, as symbolized by the architectural monuments they had erected in Syria and the lustrous reputation of Constantinople. The texts are tireless in celebrating Byzantine skills in architecture, crafts, and the fine arts. Arab Muslim authors extolled the greatness of Byzantine civilization, and Arab Muslim rulers imitated various of its aspects. The focus of the early references to Constantinople was on its ultimate conquest. This concern was real since several Muslim armies besieged and seriously threatened the city in the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries. The tenacious resistance of the Byzantines relegated the conquest of the Byzantine capital to apocalypticism.

The transferal of the caliphate to Baghdad displaced the center of gravity from Byzantium to a more easterly milieu. These changes were accompanied by an increase in confidence, and the differences between the Arabs and the Byzantines came to be expressed in terms of superiority and inferiority, although this did not encompass all aspects of Byzantine civilization. The frontier separating the powers crystallized, imposing its own version of events. In Arabic-Islamic writings, the Byzantine empire became the only real "house of war," and the war against it the very model and prototype of *jihād*. The frontier between them separated the only two viable options, two rival powers struggling to exercise the *dominium mundi*, each possessing the necessary political, social, economic, and intellectual structures. The opposition of Arab Muslims and Byzantines—born of differences in re-

ligion, language, institutions, morality, and habits—marked the zone where these dichotomies most manifestly and frequently revealed themselves. Rejecting the moral and ethical system of the Byzantines as inferior, the texts reinforced their own adherence to what they saw as a superior moral system. The representation of Byzantine women, in particular, served as a polemical focus for the belittlement of Byzantine culture. The arguments relative to Byzantine knowledge reveal, however, the complexity of the representation, disclosing a multiplicity of perspectives and the presence of converging discourses.

By studying the Muslim representation of Byzantium, we not only come to some understanding of the relationship between these two great rivals, but we also gain insight into the formation of meaning through Islamic cultural practices. In their representations of Byzantine history, culture, and society, the Muslim authors gave legitimacy to their own history, culture, and society by means of their texts. Throughout, the image of Byzantium remains in the shadow of the Muslim self-image, and Islam's identity is reinforced. Authors were self-reflexive, deliberately framing anecdotes within particular contexts. This is, for instance, illustrated in the sharp criticism leveled against the behavior of the Byzantine military leaders in Syria on the eve of and during the Islamic conquests. Their treatment is colored by the notions of justice and rightful rule that were under discussion in the developing Muslim community. Criticisms of the corrupt Byzantine élite prepares the way for its replacement by a new self-righteous elite. The discussion of Greek science and philosophy is, similarly, self-referential. The rhetoric there was intertwined with internal intellectual and theological discussions and debates.

Under the direction of the Macedonian dynasty—and particularly in the course of the fourth/tenth century—the Byzantines took the offensive and effected substantial re-conquests of what had become Muslim territory. With the weakening of the central caliphate and the revival of Byzantium, Muslim hostility became patently obvious. Particular Byzantine emperors now received

distinctly negative treatment due to their successes over the Islamic state and its rulers. This is most obvious in the textual tradition on Emperor Nicephorus Phocas, whose reign revealed, in unmistakable terms, the reversal of the two rivals' respective positions.

The assessment of the grand ceremonial of Byzantium together with the descriptions of the Byzantine capital imparts a sense of ambiguity. While the sources criticized the elaborate Byzantine ceremonial displays, which contrasted with the original simplicity of early Muslim rulers, the texts' initial condemnation is replaced, especially by the fourth/tenth century, with information of the elaborate displays taking place in the caliphal courts, in imitation of Byzantine splendor. The texts, similarly, persevere in performing the ambivalence felt toward the Byzantine metropolis—the mixture of attraction and repulsion, admiration and desire for appropriation.

The sources continued to use Byzantium as a structuring trope to denounce their own society and rulers. This is most evident in the poem of al-Qaffāl, which criticized flagrantly the Buyids. The weakness of Muslim defenses was presented as a consequence of the oppression and negligence of Muslim rulers and Byzantine victories as the product of the disunity of the Islamic world. The act of uncovering the Byzantine image presents us, thus, with some of the schemes developed by the authors to reinterpret aspects of their own history, their own self-definition, and their own view of the world. Hence, defining the Arabic-Islamic image of Byzantium is ultimately an exercise in defining the self-legitimizing narration of Arab-Muslims.

With time, the Islamic caliphate and the Byzantine empire both survived to become acknowledged equals. A *modus vivendi* was established, and although there was a lack of real knowledge and understanding of the "other" on both sides, mutual respect and even a recognition that they shared the world between them did develop. However, at the same time, a deep vein of enmity and contempt remained beneath the surface. It is this duality, with its mixture of fascination and suspicion, that

characterizes the Arabic-Islamic image of the Byzantines during most of the Abbasid era.

The new wave of Crusader conquests forced Muslim authors to view their traditional Byzantine foes, now greatly weakened, from a fresh perspective. Their reassessment of Byzantium was born of a fundamental change in political and military realities in the region that transformed the relationship between Orthodox Byzantium and the lands of Islam. Once the Muslims understood the religious and psychological motivations of the Franks, they were quickly able to distinguish between *al-Rūm* and *al-Ifranj*. Furthermore, the momentum gained from the new political alliance between the Byzantines and Saladin and, later, between the Byzantine and Mamluk states assisted in strengthening Muslim animosity toward the Franks, while the Byzantines were now viewed in much friendlier terms. The new prevailing conditions in the Near East provoked a certain shift in the contemporary image of the Byzantines and constituted a major influence in determining the selection of information on Byzantium and the resultant diversion from the previous pattern. Here again the Muslim image of Byzantium was seen to be shaped by a multitude of concerns, both internal and external and both textual and political. The sources reiterate earlier positive themes, discontinue a few negative motifs, and incorporate their new perceptions colored and accentuated by different filters and prisms, consequently affecting the traditional image. The later centuries reveal slight modifications and alterations of the Muslim tradition on Byzantium as it had principally been elaborated by the Abbasid texts.

The fascination with the city persisted until its fall in 1453. Irrespective of the level of access to "real" information, the Byzantine capital had always played a role in the Arab Muslim unconscious. The later texts depended greatly on the earlier textual tradition in their representation of the city. They produced and reproduced a textual universe that drew on common earlier themes, shaping some of them while sticking to the tendency of reducing the city to a handful of religious and imperial monu-

ments. Nevertheless, these later sources were also quite aware of the internal developments that the city underwent. The discussion of Constantinople, as it developed in the course of centuries, embodied historical, religious, and textual variables that all together shaped the image of the city.

The fact that Islam, until the Ottoman conquest of 1453, never dominated the Byzantine world, colored the fundamental discourse with respect to its Orthodox Christian rival. It must also be emphasized that the relationship between the two was not hierarchical. The Arab Muslims did not see the Byzantines and their history as barbaric and uncivilized, nor the Islamic state as superior and the Byzantines as inferior: the two rivals were equal but different. The image of Byzantium is one of a civilization that possessed an admirable history and culture—although some of its aspects are presented as corrupt, degenerate, and irredeemable. Throughout, there is a clear and self-evident idea of “us” and “them,” but behind this seemingly totalizing discourse exists a rich, diverse, and intricate image of Byzantium. Although their image represents the “other,” Byzantium was not reduced to a kind of scapegoat for everything that the Arab Muslims did not like about the world surrounding them.

The vision presented in the Arabic-Islamic texts has necessarily been selective and subjective. This is quite natural, especially given the long history of political, religious, and civilizational anxiety inspired by interstate rivalry. As a consequence, it is not surprising that the discourse is vitiated. What is surprising is how temperate it is given that the classification in terms of polarity is one of the “main elementary forms of collective representation, and one almost universally encountered in cross-cultural discourse.”¹ The texts do not convey an oversimplification of Byzantine civilization and openly praise certain of its achievements. The overall impression is one of demystification: very few areas of Byzantine civilization are treated as though they were strange and unfathomable. Hence, the Arabic-Islamic vision is neither monolithic nor reductively compartmentalized. Even more important, the texts reveal a capacity to comprehend

and engage with the society, tradition, and history of a major rival.

On some levels and in some of its aspects, Byzantium is essentialized as a timeless abstraction due to the inability of most authors to perceive temporal and spatial distinctions—between past and present and between one place and another. Similarly, “knowledge” of Byzantium was often expressed in an unchanging idiom, although historical factors in each period determined, to some extent, the content of otherwise identical images. Byzantium’s immediacy and its simultaneous divergence from familiar Islamic norms and reality meant that it was the perfect foil, a world apart. But although many of its features were viewed as too alien to be encompassed within the rubric of Islamic understanding and a certain degree of exaggeration made the two empires appear to be entirely distinct entities, Byzantium and Islam were not completely separate worlds. Their differences were not irreconcilable. Indeed, a perception that seems to be dominated by a rigid ideology, by a globality based on reductionist diagrams, still conveys nuances and distinctions that betray a deeper understanding than the one that is superficially projected, a wider comprehension than might be expected. While we cannot deny a definite imposition of patterns and values, a certain avoidance of detail, and, on certain levels, an absence of perspective, it has been impossible to collapse the representation into a simplistic division of Islam versus Byzantium.

Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs has attempted to provide an interpretation into the complex meaning of Byzantium in the Arab-Muslim literary tradition—the making and unmaking of this polemical entity, image, and identity. This wide and ambitious subject has been covered by a fraction of an immensely productive classical literary tradition. This study has tried to formulate an alternative appreciation to the politics of confrontation and hostility that so often underlies scholarly discourse on Muslim-Byzantine relations. Indeed, the connections between the two states and societies were complex and dynamic

throughout, and the discursive production reveals a sophisticated apprehension of Byzantium and a conceptualization that transcends fatal binarisms and essentialist understanding.

NOTE

1. Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Barbarians in Arab Eyes," *Past and Present* 134-137 (1992): 3-18.

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